

## COMMUNITY

# Des does us proud

by Kietley Isrin

DES Nicholson has devoted her life to helping others.

Now after 40 years, the Richmond local has been presented with the NSW Volunteer of the Year award for her 40 years' service to Hawkesbury Living by the aged and community services association.

Resident liaison manager of Hawkesbury Living, Melinda Mcilwaine said Des's dedication and generosity dates all the way back to 1971 when at the time she was a member of the Women's Airforce Association and had just moved to the Hawkesbury as her husband was in the RAAF.

"Des had started her nursing career years earlier, only to leave halfway through her studies to marry her fiance who was due to go to war in Korea," Ms Mcilwaine said.

"When the Country Women's Association called for volunteers, Des was one of the first in line. She later started to volunteer at Richmond Community Nursing Home."

Back in those days, the nursing home had a mixture of low care and high-care residents, but Des had no problem helping with the work.

"The group of volunteers at the time were able to teach residents how to knit and turn their handiwork into prizes for raffles and fetes," Ms Mcilwaine said.

"From this, they were able to raise enough money to buy the first colour TV for the lounge area for residents in the late



Des Nicholson.

70s." With her devilish sense of humour, Des also won accolades when she wrote a small play that included a mock wedding ceremony for all the residents to be involved in.

In the 1980s, Des took over the organisation of volunteers.

"Des has seen a lot of changes within the Richmond Nursing Home, from its beginnings at the old house in West Market Street to its extension and finally being moved to its current location and renaming of Hawkesbury Living," Ms Mcilwaine said.

"She has also seen the changing needs of the nursing home residents move to a high level

of care, and how a different style of support and activity is required." Over the years Des has seen volunteers become fewer and fewer in the nursing home, but this has not wavered her commitment.

"Des is a respected and highly regarded community member with her long association with the Hawkesbury Show and the Hockey Club association," Ms Mcilwaine said.

"She has only missed six months of volunteering at the nursing home in her 40-year history, and this was due to spending quality time with her husband when his health declined.

"Des has enriched the lives of residents and staff alike. She is the ultimate quiet achiever and shies away from any form of recognition.

"It has been hard to gather information of what she has done for our aged as there is not a single person who is here from when she first started to be able to give us an insight to her involvement.

"We have only scratched the surface of her dedication to us.

"Her commitment comes from the heart and she is well deserving of the Volunteer Award."

■ **BECOMING a volunteer at Hawkesbury Living is an exciting adventure. Many of the residents are locals from the community and have had the most amazing lives and have fascinating stories to tell. Volunteers are active in driving the bus for the weekly bus trip, walks around the park, board games, craft, internet and even Wii. There is never a dull moment and you always leave with a smile on your face. If you'd like to become a volunteer, contact Melinda Mcilwaine at [mmcilwaine@hawkesburyliving.com.au](mailto:mmcilwaine@hawkesburyliving.com.au)**