

Amongst Benalla's residents are a group of older people who could be referred to as Benalla's Treasures. They have contributed to the fabric of our community in a variety of ways over a long period of time, making our community a richer place.

We want to celebrate these people by sharing their individual stories and photos.

There are certainly other community members who have also made a significant contribution to the Benalla and district area. We encourage the wider Benalla community to come up with suggestions of other people they would like us to consider including as a Benalla Treasure.

These suggestions can be sent through to the Age Well in Benalla Info Hub by email on agewellinfohub@benalla.vic.gov.au or by calling 0458 587 134.

We would like to thank the Benalla "Ensign" which has been publishing articles from Age Friendly Benalla since April 2020. These articles are designed to provide information which may not be otherwise available to Benalla's older population.

Aunty Patsy Bollard

Aunty Patsy Bollard has been part of the Benalla community since 1977 when she moved to Benalla to work in the Health Department. Patsy grew up in Taree, went to University in Armidale, and then worked in Canberra for a number of years.



Benalla has appealed to Patsy because it is a very caring community. Patsy has enjoyed the walks available in Benalla, particularly around the lake, and also enjoys the art gallery and the library. She has become involved with the Uniting Church in Benalla.

Patsy has played a leading role in the Benalla Aboriginal Advisory Group. Together with Chris Thorne they have had a design input into the Aboriginal Garden located near the Benalla Lake, which is available for everyone in Benalla to enjoy. Patsy's advice to Aboriginal people is "Never be ashamed of who you are".

Changes that have happened during the time that Patsy has been in Benalla include seeing the Mural built, the '93 flood and the unfortunate loss of shops/businesses in Benalla.

Patsy's community involvement includes being a member of the Rural Australians for Refugees and making marmalade for the church and other charities to sell. Her cooking ability also includes making orange macadamia shortbread and crab apple jelly.

Patsy has an excellent soprano voice and has been part of U3A Singing activities for many years. She is very proud of her children and family, and is often collected from Benalla by the family and taken for various celebrations to Canberra.

Benalla has certainly benefited from your input over the years Patsy. Well done!



Freida was a founding member of the Friends of Winton Wetlands but stepped down when she felt her vision for the wetlands varied from others who were involved. Freida has been strongly involved in human rights issues and has regularly visited a number of detainees in detention centres. Her involvement in Rural Australian for Refugees (RAR) and the push to have a RAR in Benalla has only just come to fruition. Freida was also an integral member of the Community Plan Steering committee which saw extensive consultation undertaken in 2015/16 in the development of the Benalla Community Plan 2016-2036.

Both John and Freida have been active members of Benalla's U3A, with John having run the sustainability group for 13 years. John is also a member of the local CFA and Freida has been involved with several book and knitting groups.

After the lock downs of the past two years both John and Freida are looking forward to reconnecting back into community life, attending Swanpool Cinema and being able to swim at the pool again. However Benalla may lose John and Freida as their amazing house in Chesney Vale is currently on the market with the couple considering a move to Castlemaine.

Freida spoke of her love of philosophy and that during lockdowns her saving grace was being able to attend online philosophy classes. She would advise anyone going into retirement to take it easy, making sure you take your time to find what you are passionate about. Freida is also adamant about the power of listening to people and the need to consider three options on anything before making a final decision.

John has always wanted to change the world hence his passion for sustainability and environmental forums. He believes that we need to do everything we can to leave the world in a better place for future generations, feeling that his parents' generation was the last generation who could actually say that. John also spoke of the need to be passionate about what you do to give you a real purpose.

What a wonderful story. Thank you Freida and John for your huge contributions to the Benalla community. We will miss you both very much when you move.

Doris has noticed changes in the shopping precinct in Benalla and appreciates the rise in more cosmopolitan style cafes opening up. She notes that there has also been an increase in traffic, with it taking longer to get across the bridge in peak hour traffic, and more people from other cultures moving in, offering greater diversity in our community.

A highlight for Doris was the opening of the Aquatic Centre as Doris loves to swim and is a regular at the Benalla pool. She is looking forward to the new cinema opening in the CBD.

Doris has been on a number of groups over her time in Benalla including being on the Waminda Community House Board and an active volunteer at the house.

Doris was also the one and only community representative on the Advancing Country Towns Steering Committee (which mainly had Managers/CEOs and Govt dept reps in attendance).

Doris was also an original member of the Community Plan committee, which she continues to be involved with, and is a member of the Age Friendly Benalla Reference Group and a volunteer at the Age Well in Benalla Info Hub.

Doris also help set up a singles meet and greet group a number of years ago, with many of the participants still keeping in touch. In past years Doris assisted with the welcome bus that used to run in Benalla as well as the pilot bus tours organised for new residents in 2018. Doris loves to participate in social activities and often attends Trivia nights and would love to support other entertainment options in Benalla such as live bands, open mic nights and dances.

"After completing several courses at GOTAFE finishing with a Diploma in Community Services Doris assisted with the Foodshare program in Benalla".

Doris would like to highlight to younger people in Benalla that although they may wish to explore bigger and brighter places always remember that Benalla is a wonderful place to return to. This return of young people brings people back with fresh ideas to our community.

She also stresses the importance of contributing to your community and how much better life is when we all work together. "There is no point in criticising if you are not prepared to help solve problems and be proactive".

Freida Andrews and John Lloyd

Freida and John have lived in Chesney Vale for 18 years, having bought their property 26 years ago. They started building their own builder straw bale home in 2000 under the guidance of architect Ken Sibley and with assistance from builder Bob Derrick. The couple moved into their unfinished dream home in June 2003, finishing off the home over the next couple of years. In 2007 their amazing house, which they fondly refer to as their labor of love, won the Building Designers Association of Victoria Best Environmentally Sustainable Design - Residential award.

John was born and bred in Melbourne; however his stint teaching in Wangaratta in the late 70's and early 80's and his membership of the Wangaratta Ski Club secured his love of North East Victoria. Freida was born in Adelaide and sees herself as a city girl until moving to the North East with John. Freida has a nursing background, having worked at the Alfred Hospital when they did the first heart transplant, later moving on to work in mental health services.

Freida and John acknowledge that Benalla's central location, lake walks, access to a variety of attractions in the North East such as wineries, snowfields, and the vibrancy created by the incredible street art have all been an inspiration to them both.

John and Freida fell in love with their block of land in Chesney Vale enjoying the bird life, walks in the wetlands, kangaroos and other wildlife. However they feel that the increase in housing lots near their house has detracted from the beauty the site offered a number of years ago. There has been significant loss of vegetation and indigenous plants and the approval for a motorbike track was devastating. The draining of Lake Mokoan was also a disappointment for many in the community.

John is well known for his key role with the Benalla Sustainable Future Group. John has always been a greenie and joined Benalla and District Environment Group in 2008. In 2009, in partnership with Peter Holmes a public forum was held focusing on sustainability and climate change. This saw the group become the Benalla Sustainable Future Group. John chaired the group for 8 years, and in 2016 moved his focus to renewable energy.

In partnership with Larissa Montgomery from BRCC another forum was planned and Renewable Energy Benalla (REB) was formed. John is proud of the fact that REB has been able to fund raise and secure funding to support a number of organizations such as Munro Ave and Bernard Briggs Kindergartens to get interest free loans for energy upgrades. John has had strong and ongoing involvement with a lot of national environmental groups and is a well-respected speaker.

Doris Billingsley

Doris has lived in Benalla for 25 years. Prior to living in Benalla Doris lived in Melbourne and then travelled around many parts of Australia in a bus for 7 years, having a "hippy" lifestyle until her daughter, who had diabetes, needed to live in more stable accommodation.

Doris and her family were offered housing in Benalla West which they accepted in the late 90's. Originally Doris was born in Italy in a refugee camp, where she and her mother lived until Doris was three, when they were sponsored to migrate to Australia. Doris's parents are Slovenian. Doris only remembers being on a ship coming to Australia, she does not remember much about the hardships faced by her mother living in the refugee camp. However, she does remember entertaining people on the ship with her singing and dancing on the journey to Australia.



When the family first arrived in Australia they went to Sydney, then Rockhampton, before settling in Kew where Doris's parents still live. Doris loves Benalla. The first thing she noticed about living in Benalla when she moved here in the late 90's was how friendly and helpful the people were, and how well supported the community is with various services and activities. Having not lived in a city for a while since leaving Melbourne Doris also appreciated the quiet rural tranquility and felt she was warmly welcomed into the community, never feeling like an outsider as she had in other locations. Benalla is a pretty town and a great place to raise children and is central with a great train link to Melbourne.

Since moving here Doris is a great advocate for the Benalla West community, she was shocked to hear people refer to Benalla West as the Bronx and has worked hard to try and break down barriers between Benalla West residents and other members of the Benalla community. She feels it is so important not to judge people, especially based on where they live, as no-one can really understand how quickly people's circumstances can change. Doris likes to mention that she lives in Benalla West despite having grown up in Kew one of Melbourne's leafy eastern suburbs.

Doris is a great fan of many facilities in Benalla such as the Botanical gardens, Lake, local cemeteries (Doris loves exploring old graveyards), Art Gallery, Winton, BPACC, and many outlying rural towns with their silo art and iconic features. She also enjoys the Benalla Festival, Seniors Festival, Wall to Wall, Lakeside markets and many other events Benalla and surrounds has to offer.

Benalla has so much to offer for a town of its size and we shouldn't continually try and compare ourselves to larger towns such as Wangaratta and Shepparton.



for Fun; Easy Walks and Mid Week Walks These programs were an outcome of this seminar and continue today. Margaret served on the U3A Benalla Committee for 10 years.

Margaret was a member of the Benalla Health Board of Management for 7 years after her retirement. No doubt the Board benefitted from her wide Nursing experience. She found this position fulfilling working with fellow members of the Board.

In retirement Margaret enjoys the many and varied U3A Benalla programs; visits to the Benalla Art Gallery; walking around the lake and a regular exercise program. Her philosophy is to get involved in the community, don't give up and keep the mind and body active.

Thank you Margaret for a huge contribution to Benalla and district.

In 2004-06 he participated in the District Rotary International Friendship Exchange during which period he visited Mississippi, Newfoundland, Brazil, and India on Rotary exchange. Brian was awarded the "Paul Harris Medal" for service to Rotary and the community in 1988.

For this article Brian was asked what changes / events have you seen that you consider significant in our local history? His answer was:

- Construction of the swimming pool by Apex 1955
- Construction of the lake to replace the bulrush infested Broken River.
- Establishment of the Art Gallery
- Construction of the Senior Citizens' Building
- Bypassing the former Hume Highway through Benalla
- C B D streetscape improvements 1988
- Completion of the controversial Ceramic Mural Garden
- Improvement of the Benalla water supply and establishment of the "Brian Greed Water Treatment works" facility.
- Municipal restructure 1994, and its doubtful success for Benalla. Restructure of the Water Industry was much more successful, resulting in major benefits for all towns.

Brian was a member Benalla Art Gallery Advisory Council 1980 - 94 and was Chairman in 1983 - 94. He was re-appointed for the period 2002 - 05. He was also a member of the Benalla and District Memorial Hospital Committee of Management from 1976 to 1980.

Other organizations that Brian has been involved with include the Benalla Camera Club, Benalla Film society, Benalla Light Opera Company and the Gliding Club of Victoria.

Brian is also a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a Justice of the Peace.

Some of Brian's other achievements include building a RV-4 2-seater all-metal aeroplane and being a licensed private pilot with 2000 hours of power and 250 hours gliding experience.

What an impressive resume for one person who has lived in Benalla for 66 years. Congratulations Brian!

His words of wisdom for the community are: Be sure that the people you elect to Council have a knowledge of the Local Government Act, and have sufficient skills in economics and business management to control a very large operation.



Dr Brian Greed OAM

When Dr Brian Greed was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) on Australia Day 1995, the citation was made "In recognition of service to the community and to local government particularly the Benalla Water Board".

Brian was elected to the Benalla City Council in an extraordinary election in 1980, and was re-elected in 1980, 83, 86, 89, 92, until the Council's restructure. He was Mayor of the Benalla City Council for 3 terms 1986 - 89.

Other Committees Brian was on during his time in the Benalla City Council were as Chairman Town Planning Committee 1980 - 85; Member Finance Committee 1985 - 90 (Chairman 86 - 89); Chairman Benalla and District Rural residential Study 1982 and the Airport Advisory Committee 1982 - 1994.

Brian's involvement with the Benalla Water Board spanned three decades. He was elected to the Benalla Waterworks Trust and Benalla Sewerage Authority (later Benalla Water Board) in 1974 and became Chairman in 1985 until the restructure in Dec. 94.

On a broader scale Brian was elected to the Executive of Victorian Water and Sewerage Authorities Association (later Water Authorities Association of Victoria) in 1986 - 94. He became President in 1990 - 91, and was on the Victorian Roadsides Conservation Committee in 1989 - 92.

Brian was also appointed to the State Government's Water Industry Consultative Committee (Peak body) in 1990 - 94. After the water industry restructure, he was appointed Chairman Owens Water 1995 - 98, and then Chairman of the amalgamated North-East Water in 1998 - 2001.

A suitable honor was the naming of the new treatment plant for Benalla "The Brian Greed Water Treatment Plant" by Minister of Water Resources & Deputy Premier Patrick McNamara MP, in 1999.

These remarkable achievements were only part of Brian's contribution to the Benalla Community. Arriving in Benalla as a locum dentist for three months in 1955, Brian's stay in Benalla was extended when the original dentist Ian Westwood died a few days after Brian had arrived.

There followed 42 years of dentistry in Benalla. Brian settled well into the Benalla community, and together with his late wife June raised three children, and became very involved in the community.

Brian joined the Rotary Club of Benalla in 1957 and became President 1965 - 66, followed by being appointed to the District committee Rotary Foundation 67 - 68.

a week and has been extremely successful in fund raising for the library by selling donated second hand books. From 2008 Geraldine became heavily involved in developing U3A Benalla. In 2008 she joined the Committee and started taking minutes which was a skill she had developed during her working career.

As the membership of U3A Benalla grew Geraldine was part of the group of people who lobbied to find more suitable premises than the original small room at the High school which was being used.

Geraldine was President of U3A Benalla from 2011 to 2013, and during this period was guest speaker at many functions promoting U3A Benalla. Geraldine remained on the Committee of U3A Benalla from 2013 and in 2017 became Secretary of U3A Benalla, a position which she holds today.

In 2019 Geraldine became a member of Age Friendly Benalla. More recently

she has been a keen promoter of the Information Hub at the Library run on a Thursday morning which provides information to older people of Benalla about what opportunities are available to them.

Geraldine's excellent management skills have resulted in maintaining and expanding the membership base of the groups she has participated in.

Well done Geraldine. Thank you for a very worthwhile contribution to the Benalla Community over many years.



Shirley Robertson OAM

Shirley Robertson's passion outside her family has been her garden. Not only has she sat in her own garden and enjoyed watching the gliders and birds, but she has also opened her magnificent garden three times to raise money for the Benalla Hospital Auxiliary.



Shirley has been supporting local hospitals since she was 15. In 1952 she played in a women's football team in Birchip to raise funds for the local hospital in Birchip. Since being in Benalla Shirley has been an active member of the Benalla Hospital Auxiliary for more than 20 years, and has been chair of the Auxiliary for 15 years.

Shirley's involvement in the Benalla Community has also included over 25 years as a member of the Brail Auxiliary, with two years as President. She has also been involved with the Soroptimists for 20 years, Lakeside Probus, Jaycettes, Benalla 31 Primary School (as President and with the school parent association), Spastic Society fundraising group, Business and Professional Women's group and the Library committee. Shirley has also helped gather recipes for a number of local recipe books.

This community involvement with a variety of community groups no doubt contributed to her being awarded the OAM in 2010, and the Citizen of the Year in 2014.

Having lived in Benalla for over 50 years, Shirley has many friends and connections here. Being a keen gardener Shirley enjoys the Benalla Botanic Gardens as well as the Art Gallery, the library, the Museum and the mural. She proudly told us that the only writing on the mural is in Braille.

During Shirley's time in Benalla she has been involved in many projects, including several that have struggled against community criticism, with some even going to court. These projects have included the art gallery, swimming pool, Glasshouse, museum extension (to house the miniature house), library and even an attempt a number of years ago to sell off a number of paintings from the Art Gallery collection. People in Benalla have often been against significant projects, so nothing much has changed.

Shirley believes that people should live in the town, not on the town. And that they should be involved in the community and not expect everything for nothing.

For those who have missed seeing Shirley's magnificent garden to date, it will be opened to the public sometime in 2022 in support of Cooida.

An amazing contribution to Benalla. Thank you Shirley.

Geraldine McCorkell

Geraldine McCorkell, together with husband Gary and her family moved to Benalla in 1974, and has lived continuously in Benalla since then. Geraldine is the mother of 5 boys, and was involved with St Joseph's and FCJ Mother's Clubs when her boys were at the local schools.

Geraldine also worked for the Diocese of Bendigo for 25 years, initially in a part time capacity.

Geraldine always held the philosophy that education was assisted with books. After retirement Geraldine decided to volunteer at the Benalla Library, and during her period stacking shelves also found time to conduct Rhyme Time which has been a focus for pre kindergarten children. At this time Geraldine also started taking books around to people who were housebound.

As part of a volunteer fundraising for the library, a Friends of the Library Group started to sell books at the library and also at street stalls and other venues such as markets.

Geraldine was part of the group who lobbied intensely for the relocation of the library from the RSL buildings to its current home. This covered many years of meetings, delegations and promotions.

About 8 years ago The Friends of the Benalla Library set up a book shop near Hide's Bakery which is now known as the RedB4 Bookshop. This is run by 45 volunteers 5 days