

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.

Email your suggestions to agewellinfohub@benalla.vic.gov.au or phone us on 0458 587 134.



Margaret Jenkins (l), Age Friendly Benalla Reference Group and Chris Greentree (r), newly appointed Benalla Rural City Ageing Well Officer.

Ray O'Shannessy OAM and Bernadette O'Shannessy



When Ray O'Shannessy received his Order of Australia Medal in 2013 it was for service to the Benalla community. Ray has worked for a number of organisations in Benalla and is an Honorary Gold Medallion member of the All Blacks Football Club in recognition of his assistance with the formation of the All Blacks Cooperative. He has been Chairman of the Benalla Cemetery Trust from 1995 to 2019. Another important position he has held has been Chairman of St Joseph's Parish Finance Committee from 1988 to 2003.

Ray was also instrumental in the formation of Ballandella, which has now been absorbed by Yooralla, and the construction of their Day Training Centre and the residential premises. Ray also is proud of his association with the Salvation Army Breakfast Club which spanned 13 years.

In his business life Ray worked with Victorian Producers Co-Op in Benalla (1950-1955), St Arnaud (1955-58), Wodonga (1958-1961), Melbourne Head

Office (1961-1963) and again in Benalla (1963-1967). In 1967 Ray changed jobs, and after intensive study entered the partnership of Smith O'Shannessy as a Chartered Accountant. Ray was a Chartered Accountant in Benalla for over 30 years.

He was secretary and a syndicate member of the River Gums Estate which developed 150 residential blocks adjacent to Samaria Road. Continuing this theme, Ray was joint secretary and administrator of the Benalla Co-operative Housing Society Group which financed 525 homes in Benalla.

Ray married Bernadette in 1967 and together they have raised four wonderful children in Benalla. Bernadette has been actively involved in many committees associated with Ride Avenue Kindergarten, St Joseph's Primary School, FCJ College in Benalla and Galen College in Wangaratta. Bernadette received the Diocese of Sandhurst Community Service Award for her work at Galen College.

Bernadette has delivered meals in Benalla as part of the Meals on Wheels service to the community for 51 years and was a Benalla Council Aged Care Services driver for over 20 years. She has also been a Counsellor and Welfare Officer for St Vinnie's in Benalla for many years as well as being heavily involved with the Benalla Ladies Golf Club. Bernadette has been recognised by Rotary for her service to the community by being named as a Paul Harris Fellow.

Ray regrets that he has seen the destruction of many historic buildings in Benalla. These include the railway station dining rooms, the old Post Office, The Bank of New South Wales building, the ANZ bank building and the Benalla Hotel which was on the corner of Nunn and Bridge Street.

However, he also has appreciated the introduction of Lake Benalla, the Benalla Art Gallery and the Civic Centre (now the library), Cooinda Retirement Village and the Ballandella Day Training Centre.

Benalla as a community have benefitted in many ways from Ray's accountancy skills.

Lennie Griffiths

Lennie Griffiths, who has lived in Benalla for all of his 81 years, runs the successful LG Boxing Club Benalla from the railway goods shed which is adjacent to the Benalla Railway Station.

Lennie started a gym in his father's dairy shed in 1987 but closed this in 2001 due to problems with public liability insurance. After a short time, the Benalla Rural City Council leased the railway goods shed from V-line, and Lennie sub leases the premises from the Council.

Around 50 people use the LG Boxing Club per week which includes young boys in Prep up to people preparing for a fight. The youngsters need to be accompanied by a parent or grandparent and start arriving after 3pm three days a week for their work out. This starts with a run down to a fence about 150 metres away, and then back to the goods shed which has gym equipment such as exercise bikes and a rowing machine as well as a full-size boxing

ring. Lennie remembers one evening when 70 people were using the facility.

Lennie tells a story of the fact that he and the late Lionel Rose fought on the same program in Festival Hall one evening. Lionel won his bout, but Lennie was not so fortunate.

There have been several success stories to emerge from the LG Boxing Club. Local lad Tom Newton won a Silver medal in the Australian titles, whilst Joel Eastwood won the Regional Masters Welterweight title in 2022. Paul Christie won a Victorian and Australian super middleweight championship in 2022 also.

Starting off was difficult for Lennie. He had to form a club and become an incorporated body. Lennie says Tracey Beaton who is the Secretary of the LG Boxing Club, was a great help with the paperwork.

The club charges \$60 per year for adults and

Rex Nankervis OAM MStJ

Rex Nankervis was born in 1933 and became interested in first aid and firefighting due to demonstrations given on street corners during World War II. Rex joined the Caulfield division of the St John Ambulance brigade as a Cadet at 10 years of age and became involved with the Association for the rest of his life.

Rex was promoted to Divisional Officer, Divisional Superintendent, Corps Officer and was made a member of the order of St. John in 1974 having conducted first aid classes in Melbourne, Tallangatta, Benalla, Wangaratta, St James and Stewarton. During this time, he also acted as a volunteer ambulance officer and committee member of the North East Ambulance Service while living in Tallangatta and Benalla.

Rex attended Brighton Technical School, and later became apprenticed as an electrician before going on to study Industrial Management at RMIT. He worked as an Estimator before moving into management where he managed a manufacturing firm for several years. He then decided to conduct his own business and went to Tallangatta where a lot of electrical extension work was in progress.

At Tallangatta he joined Apex, became its President and went on to become District Governor. In Tallangatta he was also involved with the ambulance service, which was manned by volunteers, as well as being involved with building the kindergarten and serving on school committees.

Rex married Margaret in 1956 and together they raised four children. Shortly after he joined the AMP Society, which brought him to Benalla.

Joyce Borschmann

Joyce Borschmann has lived in Benalla for 53 of her 92 years. Born in Echuca, she trained as a speech and drama teacher, teaching in a number of country Victorian schools as well as a year in England. She taught at Swanpool and all three Benalla state schools with a few years as a Language Development Consultant.

Apart from teaching Joyce has been involved in several local community organisations and projects. She was a member of the Arts Council and its President, inviting well known groups such as the Melbourne Chorale and the King's Singers to perform here. The Benalla Museum, which is one of the best in Australia, was another interest. She was a committee member and volunteer there for 13 years.

Due to her interest in speech and drama Joyce joined the Benalla Drama Company in the 1970s.

As a member of the community education group Forum, she held evening drama workshops and brought keynote speakers to the town.

Joyce is very proud of the Life Membership of U3A Benalla she was awarded for starting the Singing for Fun Group in 2006 with 12 members. This group quickly grew to over 50 members and acquired its own piano and equipment. Joyce is still one of 40 members who sing at The Hub in Cooinda Village.

During the 1980s Joyce and her late husband Bob built a mud brick house at Lima South, with a local builder, family, and numerous friends. They made the bricks, cut down trees from their bush for poles in the house. Many interested locals contacted them for advice on building with mud bricks. They developed a large sustainable garden which was part of the Victorian Open

\$10 per year for juniors. It is a not-for-profit club with some large expenses. Boxing gloves are \$150 per pair, speed balls \$130 each and a head guard about \$200. All participants also need a dentist made mouth guard.

When visiting fighters come to Benalla to train at Lennie's facility, Lennie often suggests that they follow the silo art trail to see some interesting sights around the district.

Lennie's other passion is the Benalla Fire Brigade which he has been involved with for 63 years. He was Captain of the Fire Brigade for 18 years. During the 1980s and 1990s, Lennie and his wife Betty travelled to fire brigade competitions all over Victoria.

Lennie thinks young people should set goals and work toward those goals.

Lennie has a motto on the wall:

Boxing is not a game, it's a way of life 24/7. If you can't commit, don't get in.



Doug Williams

When Doug Williams came to Baddaginnie 20 years ago, he brought with him a history of serving the community that he had lived in.

Doug's working life revolved around flying. He was a licenced Aircraft Engineer (LAME) and became an aeronautical draftsman for ANA/Ansett airlines and a flying instructor at Whittlesea Executive Airlines/Stillwell Learjet before joining RMIT Technical and Further Education. Initially Doug was a lecturer at RMIT and worked his way up through the department until he was Head of Department Aerospace Technology when he retired in 1996. He was also an ATC Cadet before becoming an RAAF National Serviceman and RAAF Reservist for 36 years.

Being involved with the RAAF introduced Doug to the RSL. In Benalla, Doug served the Benalla Sub-Branch both as Secretary and Treasurer. He was also Treasurer of Benalla/ Euroa RSL and helped in a large way with the Violet Town branch of Legacy.

In Baddaginnie, he was involved with the Baddaginnie Community Development Association activities including the formation of the opportunity shop where his wife Jan was deeply involved. Doug also was involved with the Baddaginnie Primary School, Neighbourhood Watch and the CFA.

When Doug and Jan have visitors to Benalla, they often show them Benalla's magnificent parklands which include the Art Gallery, the Monash Bridge and Sir Edward 'Weary'

Stewart Coutts OAM

Stewart Coutts was born in 1944 in Melbourne. As a teacher, Stewart worked at Clarke Street Primary, and later, Benalla West for many years.

During this time Stewart became an active member of the Benalla Garden Club and was awarded a life membership in 2002. He served as President and Secretary of the Club during this time and worked on many other tasks within the Club.

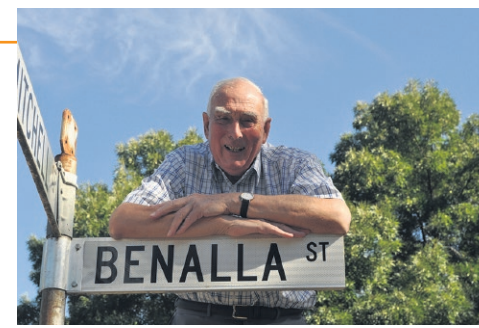
Stewart supplied many plants, bulbs and produce from his own garden, at each monthly meeting, for fundraising purposes. These funds enabled the Benalla Garden Club to support and enhance projects for the Benalla Rural City Council local projects.

Stewart was a very strong supporter of the Benalla and District Memorial Hospital Auxiliary, fundraising for equipment for our hospital for over 20 years. He provided hundreds of bulbs, packaged, labelled and priced, as well as hundreds of potted plants for the hospital stalls, netting thousands of dollars for patient care.

The Red Cross Shop has also reaped the benefit of his generosity of potted plants, vegetables and bulbs, every week for 12 years. A truly magnificent effort.

Stewart's generosity has also assisted and supported the Riding for the Disabled in their fundraising ventures.

At the Cooinda Aged Care and Retirement Village Benalla, Stewart has assisted with the vegetable garden. He has supplied planning and gardening advice to local school children who help there. Not only do the children grow in knowledge, but the residents can harvest the bountiful produce of the children's earnest endeavour.



Dunlop statue. He also shows them the former RAAF No 11 Elementary Flying School based at Benalla Aerodrome. This made an important contribution to Australia's war effort. The migrant hostel which made a post war contribution to developing our nation is also on his list.

Doug thinks that Benalla has played an important overall contribution to primary industry, commerce, communications and technology.

As a mentor for the current generation Doug has three ideas that he imparts to them. Firstly he advises young people to make every use of the opportunity that your parents, your school and your peers offer you, as these opportunities could lead to jobs. Secondly Doug says do not give up easily. If you at first you do not succeed, be prepared to convince yourself that out of failure is often the path to success. And thirdly Doug says be considerate to all people, regardless of race or faith. Be respectful and truthful and both you and your associates will benefit. Great words of advice!



Stewart has provided years of work and volunteer service to many organisations within the Benalla community, all of which have raised many thousands of dollars, over time, to benefit the Benalla and district community.

Stewart was well known at the Benalla Garden Club for his quizzes that were put together to help make bus trips go faster when attending open gardens, tours, and visits to nurseries. His quizzes also lightened the atmosphere at the annual Garden Club Christmas parties.

Stewart participated in the Open Gardens Day, welcoming the community to his home and garden. He sold plants and bulbs each year, helping the Garden Club run their Open Gardens Day in conjunction with the Benalla Festival.

A treasure truly blossomed.

Stewart was awarded the "Benalla Achiever of the Year" at the Australia Day Awards in 2013 and became a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal for services to the Benalla community in 2017.

