



Media Release

Friday 26 January 2024

Citizens recognised for digging deep to make Cockburn the best place to be

People and organisations digging deep to improve their communities, close to home and further afield, have been acknowledged at the City of Cockburn's annual Australia Day Community Citizen of the Year Awards.

Former UFC fighter **Soa Palelei** has been named overall Community Citizen of the Year for 2024, recognised for his work helping people in WA's mining sector build strong foundations for good mental health.

Dedicated youth advocate and Cockburn Youth Advisory Council member **Mackinlee Tibbits** was named the Youth (16-30 years) Community Citizen of the Year.

Valued Cockburn Seniors Centre volunteer **Maureen Stevenson**, who volunteers at the Spearwood centre almost every day of the week, is the Senior (over 65 years) Community Citizen of the Year for 2024.

The **Historical Society of Cockburn**, which has operated the Azelia Ley Homestead Museum for the past 40 years, has received the Active Citizenship – Group or Event award for 2024.

Recipients were announced at the City's annual Australia Day Citizenship Ceremony where more than 100 new Australian citizens also pledged their commitment to our country on the 75th anniversary of Australian Citizenship.

Cockburn Mayor Logan Howlett said the Cockburn community was bursting with people doing good work, often for the benefit of other people.

"Our community should be proud of itself. I know I take inspiration from those who make it their life's calling to get involved in activities, often in a volunteer capacity, to improve the quality of life for others."



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Awardees for 2024 are:

Community Citizen of the Year – Overall: **Soa Palelei**

Community Citizen of the Year – Youth (16-30 years): **Mackinlee Tibbits**

Community Citizen of the Year – Senior: **Maureen Stevenson**

Active Citizenship – Group or Event: **Historical Society of Cockburn**

Soa Palelei, a three-time International Mixed Martial Arts World Champion popularly known as “The Hulk” and appearing in several action movies, has lived in Cockburn with his family for more than 20 years.

After retiring, he wrote his memoir *Face Your Fears* and now devotes his time and energy to working in the mental health and family violence space.

The ambassador of Strong Minds, Strong Mines – a program developed specifically for the mining industry – Soa says he is humbled by empowering people.

Established in 2018, Strong Minds, Strong Mines provides awareness around the physical and mental health problems that can affect people working in remote environments, while focusing on prevention and early intervention.

Visiting hundreds of mine sites, corporate offices and schools, Soa and his mental health wellness team deliver talks and workshops to demonstrate the relationship between physical health and mental health. The program was named Mental Health Foundation Australia’s Mental Health Organisation for 2022.

Soa openly shares stories of his tough childhood experiences with others and has taken on other roles such as Ambassador for White Ribbon Australia, and the Make a Wish Foundation to spread the message and raise awareness around mental health and domestic violence.

He was inducted into the City of Cockburn's Sports Hall of Fame in 2021.



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Mackinlee Tibbits has consistently demonstrated his commitment to enhancing the Cockburn community through his active involvement with the Cockburn Youth Advisory Council.

Over the last year, he has worked diligently to provide a voice for Cockburn's youth, offering valuable insights and innovative ideas, and advocating for improved services.

Mackinlee attends the Dungeons and Dragons program at Cockburn Youth Centre twice a week where he encourages creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving among fellow participants.

He has also been a committed member of Coogee Beach Surf Life Saving Club for 12 years, excelling in surf sports and participating in the club's various community outreach programs.

Also serving as a lifeguard for four seasons, he has played a pivotal role in promoting beach safety, organising fundraising events, and fostering a sense of community among club members.

Maureen Stevens is a valued volunteer at Cockburn Seniors Centre where she volunteers her time most days.

She works on the Centre's Members Services desk and its Cafe Service across four days every week.

Maureen is also a member of the City of Cockburn's Age-friendly Reference Group which meets regularly to improve seniors' services in our community.

She actively encourages participation in seniors' activities to promote mental and physical health at the centre, where she is also a Health and Safety Representative.

Maureen was the winner of the Annual Cockburn Seniors Centre Volunteer of the Year Award in 2023.

The community-based **Historical Society of Cockburn** has operated the Azelia Ley Homestead Museum for the past 40 years.

The society opens the museum to the public, cares for the collections, runs regular museum tours, and hosts events including high teas, book launches, and school holiday programs.



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It partners with community organisations such as the Spearwood Dalmatinac Sport and Community Club to support broader heritage projects, including oral histories and historical research.

The society is also an important social hub for many older Cockburn residents.

Azelia Ley Homestead Museum displays have been shortlisted in the Museums Australia Awards' Top 10, a prestigious achievement.

The society has been recognised widely in recent years for its outstanding contribution to heritage including at the State Heritage Awards and the Royal WA Historical Society Awards.

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