

MEDIA RELEASE

YOUNG HERO, NIGHT SKY ADVOCATE AND HOSPITAL FUNDRAISER WIN MID MURRAY AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

An environmental advocate who secured Australia's first International Dark Sky Reserve, a young rower who saved her friend's life and an event that uses hot rods to raise funds for a local hospital have been honoured with awards.

The Mid Murray Council announced its Australia Day Award winners at a special event on 13 January.

Citizen of the Year Chris Tugwell was instrumental in helping Mid Murray secure Australia's first internationally-recognised Dark Sky Reserve – an achievement that has put the region on the map for astronomers, astro-photographers and keen stargazers around the world.

The Mid Murray Landcare Committee Chairman was inspired by his environmental work to seek the endorsement from the International Dark Sky Association for the 3200 square kilometre area now recognised as the River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve (RMIDSR). The reserve – one of only 19 in the world – is also the most accessible, opening up a wealth of tourism growth and economic development opportunities for the region.

Chris recruited partners including Mid Murray Council and the Astronomical Society of SA, formed a volunteer group and helped conduct dark sky measurements to collect technical evidence to underpin the application to the IDA. His lobbying with Council also saw the introduction of protection measures to minimise light pollution around and in the reserve to preserve the spectacular night sky views for generations to come.

Mid Murray Mayor Dave Burgess said the awards were an opportunity to thank all people who gave selflessly of their time and skills in contributing to their community.

"These award-winners are inspiring examples of community service and dedication to others," Mayor Burgess says.

"Chris' work, along with his team of volunteers, to secure international accreditation for the River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve is a significant achievement that will deliver environmental, economic and social benefits to our region for years to come.

"Already we have seen local tourism operators embrace the opportunity to bring more visitors to our region to discover our spectacular night skies, while economic investment in the form of new astronomy projects has also been secured for the Mid Murray. In addition to these benefits, the reserve also offers protection for our night environment from the intrusion of light pollution, meaning generations to come will be able to experience the wonder of the Milky Way and discover the treasures of space in our own backyard."

Young Citizen of the Year Ella Deramore-Denver received her honour for the brave rescue of her friend and rowing partner. The 16-year-old from Mannum came to her friend's aid during a rowing training session on the Murray River in October 2020. After suffering an epileptic seizure and capsizing her boat, Ella's friend was trapped under water and unconscious. Ella managed to swim and pull her friend – who was still strapped into her overturned rowing boat – to shore and raise the alarm.

Ella is a passionate rower who has won SA State Rowing Titles in 2018 and 2019 in single scull and double scull competition. During the 2019/20 season, Ella was also selected for the State Pathways Squad, to represent SA in the Girls State Rowing Eight team. She won the Mannum Lions Club Youth Sports Award in 2020, and has been a House Captain at Mannum Community College for the past two years.

“The heroic efforts of Ella Deramore-Denver, who came to the aid of her friend in terrifying circumstances, are truly commendable,” Mayor Burgess says.

“Ella’s bravery, quick-thinking and sheer hard work prevented an unthinkable tragedy and saved the life of her friend.”

Community Event of the Year the Mannum Hot Rod Day raised over \$6000 for the Mannum Hospital Auxiliary and drew an estimated 2,500 people to the town in March 2020.

“The Mannum Hot Rod Day has been a popular community event for the past eight years and has become a drawcard on the town’s event calendar,” Mayor Burgess says.

“Not only do the incredible volunteers who put this event together raise funds for a worthy cause, their efforts have also delivered significant benefit to our community by encouraging tourism and community connection.”

The awards will formally be presented at the Council’s **Australia Day celebration at Mary Ann Reserve, beginning with a community breakfast from 7am and formalities from 9.15am.**

“Australia Day is an opportunity to reflect on the values and people who make our country – and especially our region – the special place it is today,” Mayor Burgess says.

“Those recognised by these awards embody those values that we hold dear – service to community, respect for our natural environment and mateship.”

The community Australia Day event is supported by the Lions Club of Mannum, which will also present its Lions Youth Achievement Awards on the day.

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