

A Caring Legend

WHEN Rhonda Rovera walks around Tenterfield, she is likely to meet all kinds of people who have benefited from her community spirit.

Whether they have been girl guides, played tennis, had home care or been part of the Country Women's Association, Rhonda has played a role. For this reason, she has just been announced as the 2010 Oracles of the Bush Legend and face of Tenterfield's popular bush poetry festival.

As mother to four and administrative mainstay to family business Rovera Auto Parts & Repairs, she is a fixed part of the Tenterfield landscape, but Rhonda has still found time to join or form a long list of community groups, from the Wyoming Family Information Centre to Junior Tennis and the Tenterfield Care Centre.

"I have no regrets," Rhonda says. "You only get out of life what you put into it and I have always got more back than I put into it.

"The greatest excitement was building Haddington (Nursing Home) and being there to watch the first soil turned, watch it grow bit by bit and then getting to the stage where we could welcome residents. To know that it belongs to the community is very satisfying.

"It is only because of the support the town gives that we can achieve these things."

While Rhonda's Tenterfield family history spans more than four generations on both her mother and father's side, she has had her share of adventures outside the New England area.

"I did do lots of things before I was married," she recalls. "In those days it was really easy to change jobs and I had lovely jobs and lovely bosses."

After finishing school, Rhonda went with a friend on her first working holiday to Cairns. She remembers leaving Tenterfield on a Pioneer bus in the middle of winter, arriving in Cairns to a day so warm, they did not even need a cardigan. On the way back, they worked in jobs as varied as making ice-cream containers in a Townsville factory and housemaid at Hayman Island Resort.

Rhonda's next adventure was a five-month working holiday with a friend to New Zealand. The two caught a boat to New Zealand and hitchhiked their way around the country, picking up waitressing jobs as they went.

"We were waitresses for two weeks at the Railway Hotel in Christchurch and it was quite an experience," Rhonda says. "There was a little old house next to the hotel that looked like it was falling down, and that was our accommodation. After two weeks, we thought we were quite experienced, so we moved on."

On her return to Australia, Rhonda went to work as a clerk/typist at Australian Guarantee Corporation in Sydney. She found Sydney was too busy for her liking, and was transferred to Lismore as the assistant to the personal loans manager.

It was during her time in Lismore that Rhonda struck up her on-again, off-again relationship with a young man named Wally Rovera.

"I was fairly smitten by him right from the beginning," Rhonda smiles. "Our relationship started and stopped and we went together on and off for 12 years before we got married."

When she moved to Lismore, Rhonda found she and Wally were spending most of their free time travelling between Tenterfield and Lismore to see each other. She decided to move back to Tenterfield and worked at the hospital until she and Wally were married.

The couple had four children – Diana, now 34, Mark, 32, Brunella, 30 and John, 28. Rhonda said the family went through a hard time when all the children became sick with whooping cough. Rhonda then found she had chronic sinusitis and Wally got glandular fever and shingles.

"I tried all antibiotics and medical treatments and ended up with a lot of problems," she recalls. "I went down to eight stone – I was a mess. It was a hard time for me, particularly with little children.

"I was very blessed to have my parents and Wally's parents and a lovely lady who helped me with the housework who was just an angel. There were about five very bad years, but through a combination of good support from family and friends, my faith and natural health, I got my health

back.”

The challenge also prompted Rhonda to start one of her first major volunteer roles in Tenterfield. She founded the Tenterfield Branch of the Natural Health Society. Then, as the children took up various interests, she also found herself support various causes such as forming a new committee Tennis Association, becoming a member of the Girl Guides Parent Group, holding various roles on the St Joseph’s School committee and then playing a role in Tenterfield High School.

Rhonda’s other community roles have included: chair of the Sir Henry Parkes Festival; a committee member of the Main Street Committee, Tenterfield Care Centre and Home Care; president, secretary and international officer of the CWA Evening Branch; various roles at the Wyoming Family Information Centre; treasurer with the Tenterfield Golf Club Associates; and treasurer with the St Vincent De Paul Society. She has also been an active member of St Mary’s Parish, including a Eucharistic minister. She is currently the deputy chair of the Tenterfield Care Centre, and president of the Tenterfield Care Centre Fund-raising Committee.

Rhonda says she still enjoys playing an active role in the community and, together with husband Wally, visits people through St Vincent De Paul on weekends when she can.

“I’ve never worked for a wage since I was married,” she says. “I enjoy volunteer work very much. I have got to give something back to the community. I really like the community feel of a small town.”