



2025 Maitland Local Woman of the Year Awards



International Women's Day



Women's Network
Hunter NSW

Program

Maitland Local Woman of the Year Nominees
& guests to be seated at 6:45pm

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Acknowledgement of Country and Event Welcome
from Women's Network Hunter President, Nada Vajat

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Main Course Served

Herb Crusted Roast Beef

served with gravy, roasted vegetables and asparagus (VFO).

Chicken Supreme

Served with potato gratin, chorizo, green beans and harissa dressing (VFO).

Nominees and Local Woman of the Year Announced

by Federal Member for Paterson, Meryl Swanson MP

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Event address from State Member for Maitland

The Hon. Jenny Aitchison MP, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads

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Photos

for Nominees and Maitland's Local Woman of the Year 2024

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Dessert, tea and coffee

Passionfruit Pavlova with whipped cream, berries and lemon curd.

Ollies signature de leche caramel glazed cheesecake serviced with toffee chards and vanilla
bean ice cream.

*Thank you for joining Hunter Women's Network and State Member for
Maitland, The Hon. Jenny Aitchison MP in celebrating International Women's
Day and the announcement of Maitland's Local Woman
of the Year 2025.*

A Message from Jenny

In 2005, a small but determined group of women in Maitland decided to #InspireInclusion in our local political scene. We had just two women of 13 Councillors and no locally elected state or federal women members of Parliament in Maitland.

Councillor Vicki Woods and journalist Bronwyn Ridgway came to me with a plan to increase the participation of women in decision making in our community. I joined them as the Network's Foundation President and we formed the Women's Network. Our vision from that time has remained the same:

The Women's Network (Hunter NSW) is non-party political and aims to provide a supportive, educative forum where women can meet and participate in informed discussion about current issues and help to increase the number of women in decision making roles in the community and government.

In just three years, we managed to increase the number of women running for local government to 50 per cent in the 2008 elections, but we couldn't increase the number of women, still just 2 of 13 Councillors!. In 2012 Councillors Baker, Halliday and Penfold were elected to Council (3 of 13!).

At a state level, in 2011, the Hon Robyn Parker MLC contested and won the seat of Maitland as the first female to hold that role, and in 2015 and 2019 I was very humbled to win the seat as the second woman Member for Maitland. In 2016, Meryl Swanson MP became the first woman to hold the Federal seat of Paterson. Finally in 2017, the first female Mayor of Maitland, Clr Loretta Baker was elected after 186 years! In addition, we increased the number of seats held by women to 4 with Clr Baker, Clr Halliday, Clr Penfold and Clr Ranadive). And in 2021, we have increased to 5 women on Council – Clr Steph Fisher and Clr Kristy Ferguson join Clr Baker, Clr Ranadive and Clr Halliday! "Suddenly", there are women everywhere! In the 2024 local government elections Maitland voted in 4 women, 4 of 13.

In 2023 I was humbled to again win the seat of Maitland, form a Labor government and be named Minister for Regional Transport and Roads. Proudly the Minns cabinet is 50% women for the first time in NSW history.

Our success in breaking the bias and helping women to be elected to politics has been replicated in many other areas of community life. A number of our members – Jann Gardner, Nada Vujat, Glenda Briggs, Gail Johnston, Margaret Sivyer OAM, Sheila Turnbull and Julieanne Andrews (and many others) have made significant contributions in the worlds of business and to many cultural, service and other community organisations. We have seen an increasing diversity amongst the leaders of our city which deeply enriches our decision-making capacity as a community.

The Women's Network's aim to find ways to educate, mentor, support and provide platforms for women to lead. Whether it is the local parents and citizens association, a service club or retiree group, the Network has supported women to find our voice.

I thank the hard working volunteers of the Women's Network for putting on this event again, and I hope that you too, will see the value of the network, and join us in making a more inclusive and diverse community.

Congratulations to all the nominees.



The Hon. Jenny Aitchison MP, State Member for Maitland



Maitland's previous award winners



Samantha Meyn *2013 Local Woman of the Year*

Samantha and David Meyn founded the Harry Meyn Foundation in memory of their son Harry who lost his life to a brain tumour at the age of seven. Samantha has also won a Steel Magnolia Award and a Community Spirit Award in the Pride of Australia Awards.



Michelle Davis *2014 Local Woman of the Year*

After the tragic loss of her two sons in a car accident, Michelle Davis went on to found ROADWhyz, a program designed to deliver a powerful road safety message to school students, and Co-Found H.O.P.E. Michelle won a Steel Magnolia Award and was also awarded Maitland Woman of the Year.



Yvette Cavanagh *2015 Local Woman of the Year*

Yvette was recognised for her work as a prolific fundraiser, primarily for cancer as Chair of Maitland's highly successful Relay for Life, raising between \$100-200,000 per year. Yvette won the Hunter Volunteer Centre's Volunteer of the Year Award in 2013.



Pennie Kearney *2016 Local Woman of the Year*

Pennie joined The Mai-Wel Group in 1997 to coordinate the specialist employment division, now Mai-Wel LabourForce Solutions. She then accepted the role of CEO in the year 2000. Pennie took Mai-Wel from a mainly voluntary group through all the governance, compliance and safety changes that have happened over the last decade, including the trial of the NDIS in the Hunter and its roll out in the Maitland area.



Naomi Rees *2017 Local Woman of the Year*

Naomi Rees managed the Maitland Neighbourhood Centre for some 17 years, operating from Rutherford and Woodberry. Prior to working at the Neighbourhood Centre, Naomi volunteered for Lifeline before moving into a Training and Counsellor Coordinator role, overseeing 220 telephone counsellors.



Amorelle Dempster *2018 Local Woman of the Year*

Amorelle Dempster is the leader of Slow Food Hunter Valley and international councillor for Slow Food Australia. Amorelle was instrumental in the launch and establishment of the very first Earth Markets in the Southern hemisphere. Her café supports local producers to showcase their products and helps feed thousands of homeless and disadvantaged people.



Tara Dever *2019 Local Woman of the Year*

Tara Dever is the CEO of Mindaribba Aboriginal Land Council in Maitland, and is a proud Wiradjuri woman. Tara is passionate about community building, inclusion and good leadership, bringing the whole community together.



Karen Stackman *2020 Local Woman of the Year*

Karen Stackman is founder of the not-for-profit Hunter Academy for Performing Arts, which engages professional teachers to work with children with special needs, is a committed volunteer who gives her time to local schools, the Australian Red Cross Blood Bank and Neighbourhood watch.



Melita Chilcott *2021 Local Woman of the Year*

Melita Chilcott has spent many years volunteering with Meals on Wheels, Share the Dignity, Soul Kitchen, Rutherford Community Centre and Rutherford/Telarah Anglican Church. Melita is a proud member of the Community Hair Project where the motto is: "Restoring dignity, one haircut at a time".



Barbara Heckman *2022 Local Woman of the Year*

Barbara moved to Maitland in 1984 and has been a volunteer for Meals on Wheels, Maitland Cancer Appeal, Maitland Show Homecraft and Tocal Field days Committees, Newcastle University Science & Engineering Challenges, painting memory boxes for the Birthing Unit at Maitland Hospital and serving as the President of the Maitland CWA.



Lyn Dark *2023 Local Woman of the Year*

Since moving to Maitland over 45 years ago, Lyn has been actively involved in the Maitland community as a volunteer through her numerous activities with local schools, St John's Ambulance Australia, NSW Cancer Council, Maitland Hospital, Neighbourhood Watch, and Rutherford Lioness Club. Lyn was also instrumental in getting the West Maitland Centennial Lions Club up and running



Evelyn Stonham *2024 Local Woman of the Year*

Evelyn has been involved with football in Newcastle & Maitland for over 40 years. She has been involved with Maitland Junior Football Club for over 30 years. Evelyn currently holds the role of Secretary/Registrar and her dedication to the club knows no bounds. But Evelyn's life is not all football. She has had a long career as a registered nurse and later in WHS. She is also a talented netballer and softball player.

2025 Nominees

Montana Duggan

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Montana has volunteered for Friends of Palliative Care Inc for around 9 years and for the last 4 years as president.

Montana works full time in the health care sector, so many nights and weekends are dedicated to fulfilling her duties as president of Friends of Palliative Care Inc which she describes as a wonderful organisation.

Montana describes Friends of Palliative Care as an organisation that acts "behind-the-scenes" with support, by providing hospital style equipment to allow patients to pass away in their own homes. The group financially support patients by paying their pharmacy accounts, and most recently initiating "bucket list requests", funding patients final wishes, like a family bbq or a helicopter ride just to name a few. The group takes pride in supporting the amazing local health care workers, by funding their continuing education in the palliative care sector.

When asked "why, why do you do what you do", Montana's simple answer is for her Dad. When her dad was passing away 14 years ago, the family were lucky enough to use the services FOPC provides, so Montana says to be able to give back to patients and families in need in the local community is what she loves most.

The service is 100% non-for-profit and 100% run by volunteers and Montana says she is lucky to be surrounded by and supported by 23 other amazing people who all volunteer their time to ensure the organisation's invaluable work can continue.



Margaret Enright

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Margaret has been an active volunteer of the Hunter River Agricultural & Horticultural Association for 40 years, serving the Association with distinction, dedication, integrity and energy.

Margaret became a director on the 27th of March 1991 and has continued since.

In October 2018, Margaret was elected the first female President of the Association in its 184 year history and was re-elected unopposed in October 2021.

For 14 years, Margaret has coordinated the Young Woman (Showgirl) Competition. Margaret finds the judges and sponsors and organises the gala dinner. She also organises the entrants and winners activities during the 3 day show.

Margaret is highly supportive of young women in the Agricultural Show movement. She continues to enthusiastically encourage and mentor Young Women, who then become fabulous ambassadors for Maitland Show and Maitland City. This is evidenced by three (3) former Young Woman now being Board members of the HRA&HA.

At Showtime, Margaret manages the Members Room, preparing morning teas and lunches for 180 special guests, judges, stewards, staff and volunteers each day of the show. The morning teas are delivered to each section by Margaret, accompanied by a driver in the golf buggy. Margaret is a tireless worker and supports the Association's activities including our Maitland Community Markets. Margaret can be seen cleaning tables in the food court.

Margaret is highly committed to the success of the Maitland Showground and the Show. She has extensive knowledge of the history of the Show Association, the Showground and the Show.

Margaret is genuine and approachable, and her contribution is unmatched.



Ingrid Heyman

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Ingrid Heyman is one of the founding members of a charity in Maitland that flies under the radar, but in fact has had a very significant impact in research into cancer. Ingrid's friend, Alice Dennis decided in 1982, after her mother, daughter and brother died of cancer, that she had to help find a cure to this dreadful disease. Ingrid and Lesley Flannery, another good friend, put their hands up to help. Maitland Cancer Appeal Committee Inc. was formed; a registered charity set up to raise funds and to supply and wash linen for terminally ill people in the Maitland area.

The three ladies and the Committee spent many days in the early years organising fund raisers and setting up an Op shop at Rutherford as well as organising the linen service.

Ingrid Heyman has been volunteering in the Op shop every week from 1982. Being one of the founding members of the Maitland Cancer Appeal, she has been instrumental in keeping the funds coming in through the shop by co-ordinating volunteers, canvassing for goods to be donated, working in the shop and making goods herself to donate to the shop. With this consistent, week after week dedication has come the great reward of being involved in something rather amazing.

Since 2007, when the Committee made the decision to donate solely to Cancer Research, \$2,500,000 has been raised and given to breast, prostate, bowel, lung, pancreatic and ovarian cancer research as well as melanoma, brain tumour and leukaemia research. Ingrid has been the President of the Committee for the last 4 years and as such has been more involved than ever. At 81 years of age, she has devoted more than half of her life to this charity work and there are no plans to stop anytime soon.



Samantha Kulupach

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Samantha Kulupach's dedication to the children and families in her community is evident every day. Sam has always made children her priority at the Woodberry Early Learning Centre, often found on the floor, nurturing their growing personalities as if they were her own.

A strong advocate for family, Sam is a devoted mother to three boys, all kind, hardworking, and gentle souls. She discreetly gifts large bags of groceries to families she notices struggling, demonstrating her deep compassion for others in our community.



In her professional role, Sam creates a nurturing environment for both staff and children, providing opportunities for growth and development.

Recent challenges within the ownership structure have tested her leadership, yet her main focus remains on her staff and the families. Even on the toughest days, Sam leads from the front with grace and resilience. Her unwavering support allows her team to excel at what they do best: caring for and encouraging children.

Samantha Kulupach makes life better for everyone around her. Her selflessness, dedication, and ability to inspire others truly embody the spirit of this award.

Angie Ussher

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Angie is a local mum, musician, performing arts teacher and mentor as well as volunteer for many community groups.

Angie was Maitland's 2023 Australia Day performing arts award recipient as well as a previous nominee for Citizen of the Year.

Angie has performed at the Maitland Anzac Services in 2024.

Despite having brain surgery last year, Angie has continued to make performing arts accessible to the community. To enable this, she started an all inclusive production company called VTP Presents.

Just this year, Angie started two local community choirs called 'Valley Tone Pipes' and 'Valley tone pipettes' so people of all ages had the opportunity to get together weekly at no cost to themselves, and sing and engage with other music lovers in a safe and friendly environment.

After just one term, these choirs were able to perform for local charity, we care connect.

Angie is currently planning a children's musical to be staged in Morpeth, for children of all abilities and adapting it to be able to include a range of children who may not fit the typical performance mold.

Angie's multifaceted experiences and unwavering dedication serve as an inspiration to those around her, embodying the values of compassion, integrity and excellence in all that she does.



Christine Walmsley

*2025 Local Woman of the Year Award
Nominee*

Coming from a career spanning 40 years in teaching, including 17 years as a Primary School Principal, Chris has supported the local community in a variety of ways including Mentoring at local High Schools, and as a Volunteer at Maitland Regional Art Gallery. She was awarded a City of Maitland Service Award in 2018.

Chris joined Rotary in 2004 and has wholeheartedly embraced the ethos of Rotary. Chris has held a variety of roles within Rotary, bringing a high level of commitment and enthusiasm at all times and developing an in depth understanding of the many facets of Rotary.

Chris has held the roles of Rotary Youth leadership Awards [RYLA], Secretary, Assistant District Governor [2013-16], Chair of the District Training Team [2015-19] and

District Conference Chair – all these roles drawing on Chris' leadership, management and educational experience. From 2020-2023, Chris was appointed Area Governor in District 9670 with responsibility for 14 Rotary Clubs across the Maitland and Lower Hunter area. She has brought the same level of commitment to this role, attending numerous club meetings across the region and providing a level of insight to support the work of these clubs.

Chris is currently President of the Rotary Club of Maitland Sunrise and has been on the organising committee for the last 3 Rotary Golf Days, a major fundraiser for Maitland HealthStays Accommodation project.

In 2023 and 2024, she has worked with NSW Police, Maitland City Council and Women's Support Agencies in coordinating a March Against Domestic Violence through Maitland. Truly a remarkable community member.



Joan Palmer

2025 Local Woman of the Year Award Nominee

Joan Palmer has been nominated for her Service to the Maitland & Hunter Community.

Joan moved to Maitland in 1946 as a young school teacher & has lived in the Maitland area for 77 years.

Joan gave 40 years service to students of the Hunter in both teaching & principal roles throughout the region including Principal of Vacy, Morpeth, Mayfield West & Scone public schools. Joan was an active member of legacy from 1949 & a current legacy widow.

Joan was a foundation member of the Maitland Repertory Society.

In 1947 Joan joined Maitland Golf Club & Joan was elected life membership in 1999 after serving as a committee member for 18 years, 4 years as President, 9 years as Vice President & holding the position of secretary & handicap manager.

Joan continued active involvement at the Club following the amalgamation of the Golf Club & Bowling Club in 2003. Joan ceased golf a few years ago due to deteriorating eye sight.

Due to Joans ongoing service & commitment to the Club, Joan was appointed joint patron of Easts in 2013 a position she holds to the present time.



DON'T FORGET YOUR ANNUAL WOMEN'S NETWORK HUNTER MEMBERSHIP!

Are you an existing or new member keen to continue to support the Women's Network?

Renew/Register your membership now to ensure you don't miss out on upcoming events and activities.



Women's Network
Hunter NSW

Interested in getting more involved?

Once you have registered and paid membership, please reach out to a committee member or Network Secretary, Race Barstow 0413 270 033 womensnetworkhunter@gmail.com to learn more about opportunities within the Network.

