

Kangaroo Valley volunteer Joan Bray | Profile

By JO O'DOWD
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Joan Bray in her sylvan garden in Kangaroo Valley will once again be helping out at the Kangaroo Valley Show this weekend. Photo: ADAM WRIGHT

JOAN Bray has been a resident of Kangaroo Valley for nearly 20 years and has certainly left her mark on the beautiful village.

Her endless energy and can-do attitude have seen her take pivotal roles in many of the Valley's community organisations.

From her involvement with the historical society, the Children's Medical Research Institute, Lions club, Anzac commemorations and the annual A&H show, if there is something happening in the Valley, Joan is sure to know about it.

She came to Kangaroo Valley with her late husband James in 1995 and has been involved in community life since 1996.

Joan has worked as a volunteer at the Pioneer Park Museum and secretary and publicity officer for the historical society.

She also initiated the redesign and replanting of the park's gardens to reflect the plants grown by the early settlers in the Valley.

Joan has played an important role in raising funds for the Children's Medical Research Institute (CMRI) and has been the secretary and publicity officer for the branch as well as being a representative from the Valley at official meetings of CMRI in Sydney.

As CMRI secretary she plays an energetic role in organising the annual Melbourne Cup luncheon as the principal fundraiser for the local CMRI branch.

Being a journalist she has researched and published two books, in 2009 and 2011, on the social history of Kangaroo Valley and Wattamolla.

Planning for a third edition of both books is under way.

The books have recorded the lives and activities of the early settlers to the present day 'new settlers' who have made the area their home.

In 1999, together with husband, James, and Barbara and Gordon Douglass, she was instrumental in revitalising the Kangaroo Valley Anzac Ceremony.

Her husband was a serving member of the AIF in WWII.

The aim of reigniting the ceremony was to give the young people of the Valley a significant presence and role in the service and educate them about Australia's involvement in the theatres of conflict in both WWI and WWII.

This was achieved by organising a poster and essay competition for the various age groups at the local primary school and a poetry competition for the older students.

There are different topics each year and prizes awarded for the best entries.

Each year a commemorative coin from the Mint is awarded to all students who participate in the competitions.

The committee also organises a flyover from RAAF at Williamstown and the family day after the ceremony helps to make the commemoration a memorable and well-attended event for all residents of the town as well as for visitors.

Preparations for 2015 commemoration service are well advanced.

A special Kangaroo Valley commemorative badge has been designed with contributions from the Valley children.

“We are also arranging for a time capsule to include memorabilia from the service, the poster and poetry competitions and copies of interviews with the descendants from WWI servicemen,” Joan said.

The capsule will be opened in 2045.

“We have already received indications from families of WWI servicemen that they wish to be part of the memorial service and expect a significant increase in numbers for the march, wreath laying and general attendance,” she said.

Joan’s 10 grandchildren often visit, especially around show time and Anzac day.

“They always march in the Anzac Day march with their grandfather’s medals,” she said.

For her commitment to many causes Joan was awarded the Shoalhaven Citizen of the Year in 2007 and was also the recipient of the Peggy Synold award for Support and Commitment to the Local Community by the Kangaroo Valley Lions Club.

She was also honoured in the Department of Primary Industries’ Hidden Treasures honour roll in 2011.

Joan is a volunteer with the Valley show and come this Friday and Saturday she will be at the showground, devoting her time to the annual event.

“I think the rodeo is my favourite part of the show. By then everyone has had a chance to go around and look at everything and they’ve re-met everyone. We all sit on the banks and enjoy the show,” she said.

“It’s just important that the young people can compete and display their talents at events such as these.”

Joan has taken out first prize for the past five years with her shortbread and admits that she also makes a pretty tasty lemon curd.

She also has varied interests outside of the escarpment walls of the Valley and is currently the state president for the ANA Down to Earth club, a committee for former air hostesses.

When asked how she fits everything in, her answer is simple.

“I know that there is 24 hours in the day and seven days a week. If I feel passionate about something I find it easy to devote time to it,” she said.

“Although I am not a native of Kangaroo Valley, I feel very much a part of this community where I have spent the last 19 happy years of my life.”