

Civic awards citation for Rae Patten

Convention and Function Centre

Tuesday 30 October

Described as a “human dynamo” and a “quiet achiever”, Rae Patten hasn’t let her “invisible disability” slow her down.

Afflicted with a hearing impairment that has affected most of her adult life, Rae has been a local community volunteer for over 60 years.

Raised in Wellington, Rae moved to Palmerston North in 1953 to work in bacteriology and haematology at the hospital.

Her Christian faith has defined her life and enabled her community work, which began in 1957 on the catering committee at Central Baptist Church.

As a member of a church team, she carried out voluntary work among the city’s vulnerable.

Later, Rae supported the church outreach to Chinese immigrants and students, and made herself available to help refugees in their resettlement and integration into New Zealand life.

Once her own seven children left home, Rae took in and looked after teens “who needed a helping hand”, making sure they experienced “a home away from home”.

During the 1990's, Rae helped establish a group to mobilise the beautification of Featherston Street's Edwards Pit Park. During the project, Rae was actively involved in nurturing plants as well as people - welcoming, engaging and involving all-comers young, old, and members of the disability community.

With the beautification project completed, Rae continued as a member of the maintenance committee, and influenced the decision to establish the Roslyn Reach Trust community garden in a bare corner of Norton Park.

A huge success that involved some of the Pit Park volunteers, the Roslyn Reach garden

also appealed to more diverse ethnicities including the Bhutanese community. Rae continues to oversee maintenance of the garden.

“Most volunteer work is a team effort. You do it out of a heart that wants to do it. I love gardening and I love community, so you are really only paying back,” is how Rae regards her voluntary contributions.

It's the same philosophy that sparked her involvement with Stroke Central Region in 1995, after her husband Peter suffered a stroke. She served on the committee until earlier this year, assisting with swimming groups at the hospital and with street appeals.

A long-time active member of the Hearing Association, Rae's hard work, advocacy, leadership, experience and enthusiasm were responsible for establishing the Community Ear Nurse service.

During a time when those with hearing disabilities were often marginalised, Rae promoted social inclusivity and acceptance within the wider community, while

demonstrating effective governance and fundraising skills.

An “encourager” and “nurturer” of other volunteers, Rae says her community work has been made possible by a supportive family and her motivating faith.