

# Rick Vickers

Volunteer Award of the Year 2023

## Empowering Others Through Volunteering

The canny knack of being able to empower others is the gratifying secret behind Rick Vickers' approach to serving his community. It is a rare skill that has recently earned him the Sunshine Coast's Volunteer of the Year Award, presented by the government-backed organisation, Volunteering Sunshine Coast.



by JUDY FREDRIKSEN



From spending his childhood years cavorting around a coconut plantation in the Solomon Islands – where his father was the plantation manager – to school years in Sydney, followed by a plan to become a physical education teacher, Rick's informative years were a collage of contrasts. But his exposure to the vagaries of life did not end there, when his teaching scholarship was unexpectedly usurped by the introduction of the National Service Scheme.

"In those days, you joined up or went to jail," says Rick.

It was the 1970s when Rick found himself in the Australian Army which, somewhat to his surprise, he loved. Upon joining the army, he was told: "You're going to put on a uniform and become a physical training instructor".

"I had a wonderful time – running, jumping, running athletics carnivals, playing water polo, basketball ...

"I kept getting all of these fantastic jobs (albeit) with a bit of hard work and aptitude. And I also kept getting promoted when I did a good job."

And so the basis for Rick's future military career had been established, allowing him to maximise opportunities as he worked his way up to the position of Lieutenant Colonel.

Along the way he acquired an extensive set of management, leadership and administrative skills – skills that have stood him in good stead to undertake voluntary work, not only on the Sunshine Coast, but around South East Queensland.



Rick in his army fatigues

The rustic hamlet of Maleny, Rick's hometown, is a honeypot of volunteers. Over half the population in Maleny is retired, or semi-retired, and data from the 2021 Census shows that 25% of those people who live here had volunteered with an organisation in the previous 12 months. That's almost twice as many as the state and national averages.

From time to time, some of these volunteer groups have needed help in implementing plans for an event or overcoming an unexpected obstacle. And when that happens, Rick Vickers is the 'go to' person.

As a member of the Red Cross, Rick is the emergency services liaison officer between the Noosa and South Burnett Local Government Areas and the Red Cross's state administration.

Rick regularly shares his expertise and advice to local community groups, like those numerous sporting and recreation groups that fall under the umbrella of the Maleny District Sport and Recreation Club, or the Blackall Range Woodcrafters Guild, and the Maleny Community Centre.

Under Rick's guidance, the Maleny Rotary Club has coordinated many community projects – parking at large events and the provision of grants to local non-profit organisations being just a couple of examples.

With outstanding public speaking skills, he often serves as the Master of Ceremonies on Anzac Day, at Rotary conferences, Maleny Forums and has chaired the Hinterland Aussie Day Expo.

When it comes to volunteering, Rick says he doesn't like to do the job for others, but to teach them how to do it themselves.

"I learnt to teach people to take on a couple of skills. With volunteers, no matter what you think, all of them have an asset of some kind that you can draw on. You've just got to find it.

"If you can just limit them to what they're good at, what they enjoy doing, and not worry about all those other things, then you just need to find all those people to put together in a puzzle."

When it comes to recruiting volunteers, Rick says it can be very difficult to find people with the exact skills that are needed and suggests that organisations adjust their expectations.

"I think you've got to grow your people and develop their skills. You will never find the perfect treasurer or secretary who just joins."

▼ Rick (3rd R at back) works with the Blackall Range Woodcrafters Guild to make toys for the Salvos



In sharing his experiences, Rick says he has found it useful to have an assistant secretary, assistant treasurer or vice-president to help build on volunteer capabilities.

Two particular volunteering successes that Rick fondly recalls are the harnessing of the talents of a small group which put together a publication called *Get Ready Maleny*, a quick help guide to provide useful information in the event of disasters.

The other involved helping clubs with COVID procedures. Like businesses, clubs were in uncharted waters and bewildering circumstances when COVID arrived, and by adopting procedures proposed by Rick, they survived the difficult phase.

Camaraderie, social connections, a sense of achievement and purpose, and occasionally uncovering hidden talents, are some of the happy outcomes of volunteering.

"Some people have a passion or they want to give back to the community in some way, so they join a club."

If Rick could offer any advice to volunteer groups though, it would be to encourage them to celebrate their successes more often, and value the time that volunteers give to the community.

He also acknowledges that he could not have enjoyed the same level of achievement without the undying support and love of his wonderful wife, Priscilla.

Upon receiving the Volunteer Award of the Year, Rick accepted it on behalf of all the other volunteers who weren't on the stage with him.

"Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Sunshine Coast Community," he says.

Indeed they are! 🌱