

Media recognised for reporting our fastest-growing resource

ABC RADIO's Ian Henschke won an OPSO 2012 Media Award for the best submission about a worker over the age of 50.

OPSO President Val French AM said Mr Henschke's work highlights the coverage of positive ageing in the workforce.

The winners were announced at the annual OPSO Media Awards function held at Southbank in Brisbane 1 October.

Australia's media received high praise from the judges of the 2012 OPSO Media Awards for their

outstanding work this year in empowering older people. They considered hundreds of entries specifically entered for the mature-age-worker awards – an excellent indication that shows an improvement in the breaking down of negative stereotypes that threaten Australia's future workforce as the population ages.

These Awards, which have been running for the last 20 years, are: National Media Awards, Queensland Media Awards and the Peoples Choice Awards.

Australia's first Ambassador for Ageing, Noeline Brown, presented the National and the People's Choice Awards.

The Federal Government, the Awards' major sponsor, is to be congratulated on recognising how vital it is to have an Ambassador who truly represents the value of ageing positively and who understands the wide range of issues that affect this rapidly growing demographic.

Ms French said the OPSO Awards are given to members of the media who, with excellence, best portray older people ageing positively.

"When the Awards began 20 years ago, journalists wrote about older people parachute jumping or riding motor bikes ... doing the unexpected. Volunteering has since been added to this, and now articles appear showing older people among Australia's leading business people, artists and authors and other high achievers," she said.

"This year we are concentrating on improving OPSO's reach to both older people and to the general public to show how older workers can not only improve the quality of the lifestyle they choose, but also to help solve the problem of shortages of employees in an ageing society.

Ms French said: "Our latest weapon in the empowerment of older people is a new fortnightly 'e-newspaper', called *Life Times*, which is available on our website at opso.com.au." □

– Grant Dobinson



A delighted Ian Henschke receives the Peoples' Choice award from Ambassador for Ageing, Noeline Brown

Commonwealth Bank
is proud to be a sponsor
of OPSO's *Life Times*



Let's not forget the rural older drivers

NO MATTER WHAT the general outcome of the older driver debate, there is one message that must be pushed loud and clear – regional and remote seniors must be given consideration.

When I travelled out west last year to look at the problems facing the west after the floods some seniors travelled a hundred kilometres or more each way to put their point of view – if they failed a physical they lost their property and their livelihood.

They are an uncomplaining lot, but it is high time governments listened. I once wrote it this way:

*I have seen the patient faces
Of the women of the west,
Seen the welcome of their laughter
In eyes that know the best
And worst of living
In a legislation jest.*

*What men make women travel
For hours torn with pain
Where loneliness and suicide
Feed a country starved for rain.*

*What men make women travel
Many hours from their home,
Wake three weeks to have their babies
In a distant town alone.*

*Who fails to pay the bureaucrats
Enough to make them stay
The weeks they need to study
What works the wester way?*

*To let them sit and talk awhile,
And even understand
The east and west are different
In this dry and golden land.*

*So they may not have a dentist,
Allied health and all the rest
For there's never many votes you see,
In the people of the west. □*

– Val French

Retirees seek further funding for dementia research

WITH THE increasing number of seniors combined with longevity the incidence of dementia is rapidly rising. Currently there are no preventative measures, there is no cure and there are no means to slow the progress of the disease. During Dementia Week the Association of Independent Retirees (A.I.R.) Ltd is calling on the Government to increase funds for research into this devastating disease.

A.I.R. National President, John Wenban, said “that Dementia is the single greatest cause of disability in older Australians and with no immediate prospects of new treatments an increase in funding is urgently needed.

At the moment there are 280 000 Australians suffering dementia and 24 million worldwide.

“It is very sad to see someone you love with dementia,” Mr Wenban said. “It is heartbreaking for the family, terrible for friends and a loss for the person’s contacts in the community. Dementia is not a just a normal part of ageing. However it is one side effect of the ageing population,” he said.

As the number of Dementia cases is increasing, A.I.R. believes that much more money is needed for research to fight the Dementia epidemic.

The Association of Independent Retirees (A.I.R.) is the peak body representing the interests of retirees who are wholly or partly self-funded in retirement. A.I.R.’s members include full and part self-funded retirees, and superannuants. □

GRANFRIENDS

What a wonderful group of volunteers across Queensland, teaching sewing, knitting, crochet and embroidery in primary schools.

Having started in Brisbane four years ago, we have now expanded to Bundaberg and Townsville areas.

Our Bundaberg coordinator *Pam Matthews* is very pleased with the project and is enjoying great success.

Our Townsville coordinator *Diane Dowdle* has just been appointed and is looking forward to meeting the Townsville volunteers.

We have received interest from Cairns and Warwick and expect those areas to be established by 2013.

Primary school children love learning their new craft. They are especially pleased when they finish an article and can take it home.

GRANFRIENDS are always looking for interested volunteers. Contact numbers are:

Brisbane: Blanche O'Connor (07) 3324 2779

Bundaberg: Pam Matthews (07) 4151 1643

Townsville: Diane Dowdle (07) 4773 3704

movie review



Grant Dobinson reviews *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*

DIRECTOR JOHN MADDEN tackles the prickly topic of the cost of retiring – albeit from a British perspective – with a vignette of quirky-but-sensitive and marvelously intertwined stories.

A mixed bag of British retirees who simply cannot afford the cost of retirement villages in their home country travel to India to live out their days in what they have been led to believe is a smartly renovated Raj-style hotel. They meet in a Heathrow Airport departure lounge, having no idea of what life is about to throw at them.

Things start to unravel for most of them after they land in India and try to make their way to the hotel. This is where Madden really begins his tale of how vastly different personalities handle what is thrown at them at a time in life that most people believe should be when they can slow down and smell the roses.

Each character has their own story and the ensemble cast does a first-rate job. Maggie Smith's character, Muriel, seems a bigoted, self-centred and angry lady who has no love of society. She certainly comes across as a shallow and reactive personality for whom the viewer could hold no respect.

Judie Dench's Evelyn is one of the plot's lynch pins and she does excellent work in portraying an intelligent woman who was forced by society to be a housewife who spent her life being seen and not heard. However, soon after settling in the hotel she must – for the first

time in her life – find paid work to survive. Her husband had left her with a huge debt and she had to sell her house to pay for the trip to India.

The other story lynch pin is British barrister Graham, played by Tom Wilkinson. Without wishing to give the game away, Graham travels to India to walk a path along which he wished to for all of his working life. For him it is a journey of discovery, and in doing so he mentors several of the other characters.

British film stalwarts Bill Nighy, Penelope Wilton and Celia Imrie (*Calendar Girls*) and Ronald Pickup are as classy an act as one could expect. Bill Nighy plays an opposite style to his usual characters. Dev Patel, who plays the hotel manager Sonny, does a first-rate job as a hyper-enthusiastic, young entrepreneur who really does try hard to give his guests the best-possible experience – despite which, his efforts seem less than productive.

Madden tells a wonderful story with an expert crafting of multiple subplots, so it's a shame to release this cinematic masterpiece so early in the season as it will have a far lower chance of landing an Oscar. I believe this is a truly great piece of cinema as it beautifully shows the human condition, and especially the way it shows that older folk are people too. Far too often films portray the elderly as frail and incapable, and Madden shows his characters as wonderfully resourceful, resilient and just how amazing the human condition can be.

By artfully painting dire circumstance and misfortune, Madden has created a great vehicle to show society the true value of elders and that age is not a barrier – it's merely the second half of life.

And it's not just the lives of the Brits under the microscope here – the poverty of India, the mores of both Western and Eastern societies are tested. There is also a tale of young love, and a surprising tale of old and forbidden love – both treated without bias and with sensitivity and delicacy. I left the cinema with a lot to think about and challenge my usual take on life.

While I'm seriously at risk here of sounding like a sycophant, I would also like to point out that this movie does have a rather American-style, saccharine ending. That said, it does have some lovely plot twists and it will have many crying, laughing and cheering some of these characters on. It is an unusual case where the theatrical trailers actually portray the film as being shallower than it really is ... and that is a huge bonus in a world of false promises.

Best Marigold has left mainstream cinema now, but I thoroughly recommend you buy or hire the video. This is great British cinema that will make you laugh, cry and root for the underdog. □

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Letters to OPSO

What a waste – councils charge singles the family rate

I am a single pensioner living on the Gold Coast. I was wondering if you can do anything to help get a new law passed whereby local councils can only charge a single pensioner a percentage of the Waste Water & Water Service Charge, instead of the full charge that a working family pays.

The charges on the Gold Coast with Allconnex water have been around \$880 a year, making it about \$1000 a year.

This is too much to pay, when you only use a small amount of water, I myself only use about \$40 in a 6 month period.

I have been trying to fight this on my own for 18 months now, sending letters to premiers, mayors, the Queensland Ombudsman, Complaints Queensland, newspapers, Channels 9 & 7 – all to no avail, usually with an answer 'passing the buck'.

I have even gone so far as not paying for 18 months (now \$1,738.97) hoping that they will take me to court – that way the media would have to take notice of the shocking way they are ripping off single pensioners.

I want to fight this, but I am getting nowhere alone. Can you Help? ... or think of anyone who can?

I know it is a big job, but we have to start sticking up for ourselves.

– from the Gold Coast

Medicine cost too high for singles

Val, I decided to send this email after seeing you on ACA this evening. I am not on an aged pension but am on a Disability Support Pension and I also work part time so am lucky that way.

I wonder why no one has run any sort of program regarding medication costs and the amount you need to spend to get on the 'free list'.

I am single but still have to reach the same dollar amount as married couples and also families. I don't think this is fair, and it needs to be looked at and also put to the government.

I am sorry if this isn't something you deal with but thought I would give it a try.

– from Ocean Grove,
Victoria

Sydney water woes

I have just seen a segment on A Current Affair about water rates for single pensioners. I live in Sydney but not a pensioner myself. The greatest unfairness with Sydney Water's fees is the flat wastewater service fee (\$134) paid by every residential property.

It would be fairer if there was a sewerage service fee for being connected to the sewer plus a usage fee based on the amount of water used (water in = sewerage out).

Water conservation is mainly a waste of effort because a tiny increase in the fees wipes out any saving in water usage.

– from Sydney

Responsibility is a two-way street

REASONABLE SENIORS over 75 would have no problem with the suggestion that they have a medical examination each year if reasonable governments would ensure seniors are provided with transport that would allow them a proper quality of life – not just because it is their responsibility to do so, but also because it is economically advisable.

While we need to balance the economy, we also need to think about the word BALANCE.

For example, it makes little sense to cut back on adequate off-peak transport for seniors, or to ignore the social and economic consequences of cutting back on subsidised seniors' fares.

If you cut back on subsidised fares and appropriate, adequate transport, you restrict the ability of older citizens to live a healthy life. You also lose the substantial financial contribution of senior volunteers, let alone ensure a huge impact on the hospital system.

There is always a great need to ensure that so called economic cuts do not lead to social and economic failure. □

– Val French

Trafficking in blame

OFTEN, when there is an traffic accident involving an elderly driver, there is a knee-jerk reaction by the media to demand increasingly ridiculous strictures on older people holding driving licences.

This may condemn many to a life of hardship and isolation. They are eliminated as soon as they are considered a 'burden to society' or that they do not have 'quality of life'. Yet, no-one asks them. They are the ones who have done – and continue to do – so much for the community.

With so many volunteering in every way, selflessly. It is always difficult and sad when anyone is killed or injured at any time.

Recently a truck and bus collided killing a child and severely injuring many – the age of the drivers were 27 and 34. Accidents do happen and, disproportionately, very few are caused by seniors.

Seniors are more often the victims of road rage, and not the instigators.

Journalists sometimes dig up all the senior-related accidents over the last 10 or so years to sensationalise their story. Most older drivers have a wealth of experience, and they more often prevent accidents. None of this ever goes on record. Only the adverse is ever published or broadcast. □

– Victoria Zografos