

History advocate awarded

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Sue Thompson has been award the inaugural history advocacy prize by the History Council of Victoria. Picture: ROB CAREW. 200586_02

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By Mikayla van Loon

Sue Thompson has been a fierce advocate for the continued celebration of history in Lilydale and surrounding areas for the last 30 years, something she has now been recognised for by the History Council of Victoria.

As the inaugural winner of the Jane Hansen Prize for History Advocacy, Ms Thompson's dedication to history not only as president of the Lilydale and District Historical Society but even prior has been acknowledged.

Ms Thompson said given the list of worthy recipients she was "gobsmacked" by the announcement made on Thursday 21 October.

"I'm a little overwhelmed at the honour the History Council of Victoria and Jane Hansen has just given me," she said.

"I accept it on behalf of all those people throughout Victoria who actively promote the value of history in their communities."

The prize was established in 2020 to applaud the efforts of groups or individuals who advocate for the value of history, the work of historians and the need for history in education.

It is named after Jane Hansen AO who has always had a passion for history and has been a supporter of the History Council of Victoria through her philanthropic work.

"I think Sue's ongoing energy and advocating history is wonderful. As well as a respected public speaker, she has embraced current technologies to reach new audiences through two important websites," Ms Hansen said.

Commended for her role in advocating for the Value of History Statement to be adopted by Yarra Ranges Council, Ms Hansen said Ms Thompson embodied all the reasons why she supported the establishment of such a prize.

Yarra Ranges Council Mayor Fiona McAllister said the council was "thrilled" to hear of Ms Thompson's award.

"I think I can speak on behalf of all the councillors, we absolutely admire all the wonderful work that you do for our community but we love your voice and your presence in our council meetings," Cr McAllister said.

"I have to say for me as mayor, having you there and the voice that checks in and knowing that you have views everytime that add huge value to our council process is greatly appreciated.

"We are absolutely thrilled about this award and we couldn't have thought of a better person to be an inaugural recipient."

Having worked as a journalist for 40 years, Ms Thompson said she was able to combine her love for history with her storytelling skills.

“Way back in the very early 60s I had a school assignment about my family. This started my lifelong love of history,” she said.

“After a brief stint in the law, I found my niche in journalism where I spent the next 40 years working with and promoting local communities and their stories.”

It was her work on the Lilydale Express’ centenary edition of the newspaper in 1987 however, that allowed her to join the Lilydale Historical Society.

As president of the historical society, Ms Thompson has been a voice for change, expressing her passion for history at every turn and embedding the need for history across a range of platforms as technologies develop.

Ms Thompson said often the historical society was known as the “hysterical society which was full of old people.”

“To me there is only one way to counter that description – be active, be innovative and use technology to promote the value of history and its importance in society.

“As historians we have to accept change but we should always try to ensure our community’s history is woven into all new projects and activities to ensure its stories are preserved and told to present and future residents.”
