

AMA COMMUNITY SERVICES MEDAL

At its meeting in March 1996, the Branch Council of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Medical Association resolved that it would establish an AMA Community Services Medal which would be available as from 1997 and would be awarded to individuals who were not members of the AMA, who were deemed by Branch Council to have given extraordinary service to the medical profession and the cause of medical practice within Tasmania.

A special silver medal has been struck for this purpose and the Executive Committee of Branch Council decided in September, 1996, that an inaugural presentation would be made at the 1997 Annual Dinner of the Tasmanian Branch of the Association to a person who was judged to eminently fit the criteria established by Branch Council for selection to this prestigious award.

INAUGURAL AWARD

Mrs Mary Piles

AMA COMMUNITY SERVICES MEDAL INAUGURAL PRESENTATION - 1997

The inaugural recipient of the AMA Community Services Medal is Mrs Mary Piles.

Mary is currently Executive Secretary at AMA House in Hobart, a position she has filled for 25 years on 12th July next.

Mary Piles commenced work with the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Medical Association on 12th July, 1972, initially in a temporary capacity whilst the previous employee took maternity leave.

That temporary position, intended to run for no more than 3 months, turned into a permanent appointment when it was decided by the Executive of the day that splitting the position into 2 part time appointments would not be appropriate.

When Mary was given sole charge of the administration of the office of the Tasmanian Branch of the Association, it was a single dull, gloomy room, heated by a two bar radiator positioned under the desk, together with an off-peak storage heater. A single typewriter, an ancient Gestetner stencil machine along with numerous shelves of stationary and an equally old Addressograph machine, sat obscured behind the glass partition.

While the prestigious building did justice to the reputation of the AMA in Tasmania as its headquarters, with ample parking and bright outlook, administrative responsibilities were mammoth, particularly when a full mailout to members was to take place, with the production of the required material by either the Gestetner and then later, the "new modern photocopier" which required cooling many times during a single production run.

The manning of phones, the licking of stamps, and the monitoring of the many visitors who called from time to time were all part of Mary's routine.

Having been previously employed at Tasmanian Television (Channel 6), Glasser and Parker and the Health Department, Mary Piles had adequately developed the organisational and secretarial skills which were required to assure her success in this vital position within the Tasmanian Branch of the AMA.

In those early years, with young daughters Heather and Elizabeth, the Branch Council Room would frequently become a makeshift creche on those occasions during school holidays or when illness and other arrangements intervened.

In collaboration with the succession of Presidents, Honorary Medical Secretaries and Treasurers, Mary worked on the progressive development of the AMA in Tasmania and its influence on the medical profession at all levels and on health policy generally.

The arrival of Di Cornish provided not only an availability for some part time relief but also important company for a building such as AMA House.

The countless volunteers from among the Association's Executive, Branch Council, Divisions, and general membership have all found their efforts enriched by the methodical and prompt responses which she would give to their queries and her accurate dissemination of advice and information which emanated from their several Councils, committees, et cetera.

Her organisational, secretarial and administrative skills were fully put to the test in 1981 on the occasion of the Sixth Australian Medical Congress held in both the north and south of the state and requiring the highest level of coordination and cooperation between national and state officials and involving international visitors.

The success of that event was due in part to the stability and initiative shown by Mary Piles as she worked with the many individuals who were involved to provide the required organisation of all sessions in all regions of the state.

It was on this occasion when the Hobart section of the Congress was being organised and part-time helpers were moved to the downstairs section of AMA House that difficulties were experienced in transferring telephone calls. Not to be deterred, it became Mary's normal practice to run downstairs when a call came through rather than trying to transfer it directly.

Such arrangements may well suffice provided there is a guarantee of fine weather. On that occasion, there was no such guarantee.

With the passing of years, AMA House was becoming the single address for a large number of specialist colleges and related organisations.

As the technological revolution in administration took hold during the decade of the 1980's Mary Piles proved more than equal to the task of upgrading her skills to meet the resulting challenges and ensure that the AMA membership attained its required benefits from the introduction of this technology.

With the AMA continuing to build up its influence in the areas of health, welfare and social justice policy, the range of issues addressed and the volume of work required continued to build as the 1980's drew to a close.

Far from being able to take a breath however, the advent of a young medical practitioner by the name of Dr Brendan Nelson added a new dimension to the operation of the AMA in Tasmania which carried with it, lessons for both the AMA membership and Mary Piles alike.

The Executive Secretary was equal to the challenge. As Brendan was heard to say recently -Were it not for Mary Piles, he would not have been AMA President, embarked on a career direction away from general practice, or find the position in politics which he currently occupies.

As membership and responsibilities grew during the Presidency of Brendan Nelson, a second staff member, Rebecca Cooley, commenced duties at AMA House to assist with the volume of work now being generated and this became even more so towards the end of his term with the appointment of a fulltime Executive Officer to assist in the sustaining of membership and the more adequate servicing of members needs.

The technological revolution at AMA has simply continued to develop.

The contact with membership, with members across the state has become more frequent.

The pressure on the administrative staff has continued to build. But no matter what the time of day or whatever that pressure, the bright, welcoming sound of "Good morning AMA" will be heard when Mary answers the phone for whatever reason.

Mary Piles is probably the longest serving staff member of the AMA in Australia.

She is by far the most outstanding staff member for the AMA throughout Australia.

As it is recorded in the Annual Report of the Tasmanian Branch of the AMA, unanimously adopted at today's Annual General Meeting, "Members should be aware that 1997 sees the 25th year of service by Mary for the Tasmanian Branch of the AMA for which I am sure all are appreciative. Not only has this service epitomised the loyalty and commitment of Mary Piles to this Association but it has been carried out at a level of unsurpassed competence, exercised with absolute integrity".

It is most fitting that the Inaugural Award of the AMA Community Services Medal is Executive Secretary, Mrs Mary Piles.