

Thank you, Councillor Olga Qulity

Dr Helen Haines, Senator Bridget McKenzie, Ron Mildren, Councillors, Life Members, ladies, and gentlemen.

Speaking on behalf of the Club, we were pleasantly surprised members of the community believed our actions worthy of a nomination. To then have the City of Wodonga endorse those nominations was something else altogether! The WHC is both humbled and honoured to be receiving the Wodonga Community Organization Award for 2024.

There have been some amazing community focused organisations such as the Wodonga SES and FoodShare who have won the award previously. Now, to have our Club listed with these organisations is inspiring and reinforces our aim to make a positive difference.

The Clubs mantra is FAMILY, FUN, FAIR. These principles have helped define our Club culture, and ensures we are giving back to the community more than we receive.

- **FAMILY:** is at the heart of what we do and act; we look after each other in tough times and celebrate each other's success; we always focus on putting the team before ourselves, on and off the field.
- **FUN:** we aim to provide an enjoyable environment where members feel safe, valued, and where we build resilience and feel better about ourselves.
- **FAIR:** we are an inclusive Club where ALL are welcome no matter a person's gender, age, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or ability; we have a commitment to contest in a good spirit and encourages a good attitude that includes respect, modesty, generosity, and friendship.

It's not surprising then that we are not solely driven by winning on the sporting field. To do so is a bonus, but for our Club sport and recreation is about helping build stronger, healthier, happier, and safer communities.

The Club has worked tirelessly, particularly over the last 10 years, with the aim to grow and deepen our sense of purpose within the Wodonga community. With only 47% of children aged 0-14 participating in organised sport, kids' participation remains a key focus. We understand that if kids are physically active, they do better at school by enhancing cognitive function, improving memory, behaviour, concentration, and academic achievement. They become better members of the community.

Our Clubs initiatives have been community family focussed.

- We undertake comprehensive primary school road shows each year where we aim to introduce circa 1,000 children to our fun sport.
- We operate a successfully "Come and Try" and U 7's/U10's program, with record participants the last few years.
- Have created policies allowing families to continue to play hockey even in the face of financial hardship.

- Established 10 years ago the Border Indoor Hockey Competition, introducing more participants to our community of players.
- Have raised money for local and National charities through the establishment of annual games of significance.
- Was the first sporting Club in regional Victoria to adopt the Fair go Sport program, the fore runner for PRIDE round, making our Club more inclusive.
- We promoted and participated in the regions first hockey reconciliation round, with a playing strip designed by a local artist.
- Commenced an annual ANZAC match supported by the local Wodonga RSL branch.
- And of course, we were the driver behind the upgraded community facilities at the Wodonga Hockey Centre. It may surprise some that Hockey has had a presence in Wodonga since 1928. Since this time our members have spoken about how amazing it would be to have our own Club House, a place we could call home. To have facilities which provides high levels of umpire, players, members, and spectators safety and comfort. A home where we can come together and celebrate our Clubs unique community, family centric culture. Last year this finally came to fruition. This would not have happened without the support of the Victorian State Government, the Federal Government, and of course the Wodonga City Council.

So determined was our Club to make this vision into a reality, that we contributed \$250k directly to the project. For a relatively small, regional local sporting Club, this was a major contribution to a sizeable Wodonga infrastructure project totalling \$3.2m

Last year the Community was saddened to hear of the passing of former Councillor John Watson to cancer. John was a long-time passionate servant of the City of Wodonga. His support for the communities' volunteers was unwavering. John was also an advocate of our sport and our Club having served on the Committee as well as being involved with numerous junior teams his sons played for. We like to think John would be proud of the Club for being recognised in this way.

To the past and present members and supporters of the Wodonga Hockey Club, this award is in recognition of your contribution, dedication, and desire to make a real difference within the Community of Wodonga.

And finally, in the words of Ralph Emerson:

*"To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived — that is to have succeeded."*

Thank you.