

Betty, the fighter for those in need

OBITUARY
BY HOWARD JONES

BETTY McLean, was one of Albury-Wodonga's most influential women in the late 20th century.

By nature a battler and a stirrer, Mrs McLean fought tenaciously for years to improve the lot of disadvantaged women on the Border.

She did so not only by serving on numerous community committees and being a city councillor, but through running with her husband the district's first women's refuge, working in op shops and raising money for several causes.

Close friend Jean Whitla yesterday described Mrs McLean as a clever woman who saw a need for social justice and did it.

"She was the most extraordinary woman who had such great compassion and integrity," she said.

"If she ever saw a need for something, she would work to get it."

Mrs Whitla recalled when her friend and her husband, Bob McLean, started a women's refuge.

"Her perseverance to improve the lives of others was just remarkable," she said.

"Wodonga has lost its social conscience."

Mrs McLean died at Westmont Homestead, Baranduda, on Friday. She was 90.

She had an unsettled childhood in a broken home and part of the time was spent in boarding schools.

In 1944, she married a young army officer, Bob McLean, a move that ended her plan to be a nurse.

The couple raised three children, Robyn, David (deceased) and Vicki.

Bob rose to the rank of colonel and was area commander for Albury-Wodonga.

Postings took his family to various parts



● Betty McLean, who died on Friday aged 90, remained a keen swimmer well into her 80s.



● Bob and Betty McLean raised three children.

of Australia and to England in 1950-52 and 1969-70.

The McLeans had first moved to Wodonga in 1964 and returned for good in 1972.

It didn't take long for both to become pillars of the community, Colonel McLean at times chairing the Wodonga hospital board and serving on the Albury-Wodonga corporation.

Mrs McLean, while raising a family, became involved in the Country Women's Association and Red Cross.

In 1974 she and Colonel McLean opened Albury-Wodonga's first women's refuge in their home — her pioneering role now recognised in Albury's Betty's Place refuge.

Mrs McLean served with passion on Wodonga Council from 1977 to 1993.

She took a special interest in promoting the welfare of women, children and disadvantaged or disabled people, often in company with fellow councillor Pam Stone.

She frequently made the point that not everyone had a car or could afford certain council charges.

For years, she chaired the health, welfare and community services committees.

Her civic role also led her to serve in other organisations such as the Upper Murray Regional Library and groups covering matters as diverse as kindergartens, public housing, scouting, the ABC, abattoirs and family planning.

Mrs McLean, in fact, convinced Wodonga hospital to start a family planning clinic after a male-dominated council had refused to auspice one.

She didn't just sit on committees but worked in opportunity shops, washing and ironing clothes and sorting goods for the Society of St Vincent de Paul or Upper Murray Family Care.

The McLeans were regular swimmers at the old Stanley Street pool.

She fought success-

fully to defend it from redevelopment while she was a councillor.

Mrs McLean and Marie Cardwell were responsible for creating the Vermont Court hostel next to the hospital. She was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1989.

After her retirement from the council, she continued to serve as a watchdog from the gallery until ill-health kept her home. She continued her involvement with the CWA, neighbourhood houses, show society, historical society and the senior citizens' club.

After her husband's death in 2007, Mrs McLean became a resident of Vermont's successor hostel, Westmont.

Mrs McLean is survived by her two daughters, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

A funeral will be held at Conway's Funeral Home in Wodonga on Friday at 11.30am.

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THE BEST OF BETTY

■ "Bob and I have always been busy people. Gives us something to talk about."

■ "They (the CWA) are a radical group when you get to the heart of it."

■ "As mayor you have to give (out) council policies that you do not always agree with and I could no sooner do that than fly over the moon."

■ "Bob has always respected my right to be an individual, even though he must have wanted to cut my throat a few times."

■ "I come up for re-election next year (1990), but my kids keep saying I'll die of cancer first. It's the cigarettes."

■ "I wasn't going to kow-tow to any man (on explaining why she refused at six years old to kiss the

ring of Archbishop Daniel Mannix while at a Catholic school, although not a Catholic)."

■ "Women have had a pretty raw deal through life. We (the Albury-Wodonga Women's Electoral Lobby in the 1970s) woke up a lot of people."

■ "I follow the principle of doing to others as you would like done to yourself."

Betty always a wise and generous fighter

BY ANTHONY BUNN

BLUNT at times, generous on other occasions and a tower of strength to those in need — those were elements of the strong character of former Wodonga councillor Betty McLean.

Those facets and more were recalled yesterday at the funeral for Mrs McLean who died on February 14, nearly three months after celebrating her 90th birthday.

About 70 mourners gathered at Wodonga's Conway Funeral Home to farewell Mrs McLean who was a councillor from 1977 to 1993.

She was also the inspiration for Betty's Place, an Albury domestic violence refuge which opened in 2005.

Daughter Vicki McLean told mourners, who included the member for Indi Cathy McGowan and Wodonga mayor Rodney Wangman, that she was a mother with many skills and passions.

"Although often blunt and forthright in conversation, as many of you will know, she possessed an innate gentleness and warmth toward others which manifested itself in myriad ways," Ms McLean said.

"Her encyclopedic memory for people was matched by her care and concern for their wellbeing.

"She admired the great without blindness, recognised ability without envy and was quick to see the merits and good in others."

Ms McLean told of how her mother and late father, Bob, helped accommodate victims of domestic violence and gave money to those "down on their luck", often parents who could not afford food, school books or excursions.

"These acts of generosity were done quietly and in private with no expectation of return," Ms McLean said.

Betty McLean's achievements included being Wodonga's citizen of the year in 2000, the only woman appointed to the Victorian Abattoir and Meat Inspection Authority, co-founder of the Albury Community Centre and president of Upper Murray Family Care.

But Ms McLean said her mother was particularly touched by having Albury's women's refuge named in her honour.

"The first women's refuge was in Betty and Bob's home in Beechworth Road and it was probably one of mum's proudest moments to be at the opening at Betty's Place — not just for the recognition, but for the relief of knowing that there was a place of safety for those who needed it," Ms McLean said.

The chairman of the Albury-Wodonga Community Network, Colin Adcock, oversees the administration of Betty's Place.

"Betty, through your work and dedication you have made the world a better place. You have made Albury-Wodonga a better place," Mr Adcock said.

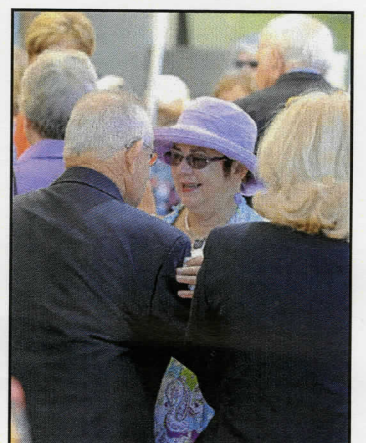
"Today, thousands of women and children can thank you for your passion and unswerving commitment to supporting them rebuild their lives."

Ms McLean was joined at the funeral by her sister Robyn Sterrett and three of Mrs McLean's five grandchildren.



● Vicki McLean, left, reads her eulogy below a portrait of her mother Betty and father Bob and, below left, Mrs McLean's coffin was draped with the Australian flag and topped with special photos and, below right, Mrs McLean's daughter Robyn Sterrett is consoled following the service.

Pictures: PETER MERKESTEYN



Teachers push for school funding

TEACHERS hope a poll showing the public's strong support for better school funding will pressure the federal government into including more money for education in the May budget.

The federal government has pledged \$2.8 billion in extra money for schools over the next four years,

but this falls \$7 billion short of the six-year deal the previous Labor government had promised.

But a UMR poll commissioned by the Australian Education Union and released yesterday shows more than three in five people support the federal government funding the full \$10 billion, de-

spite the difficult budget climate.

Education Minister Christopher Pyne said he'll negotiate a new four-year funding agreement in 2017, which is the final year of the current deal.

The AEU has been pushing for the federal government to commit to at least a fifth year of

funding in the May 13 budget.

The union's national president, Angelo Gavrielatos, said the poll results show the community expects the government to deliver the new Gonski-based funding system in full.

"No amount of policy backflips or partisan ap-

pointments to unnecessary reviews have distracted the community from resounding support for Gonski," he said.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten told the union's national conference yesterday the Coalition had destroyed what was a "unity ticket" on education funding.