MEDIA RELEASE
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2017 NSW AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

2017 NSW Australian of the Year – Deng Adut
2017 NSW Senior Australian of the Year – Dr John Knight AM
2017 NSW Young Australian of the Year – Arthur Alla
2017 NSW Local Hero – Josephine Peter

The NSW Premier, Mike Baird, has announced the 2017 NSW Australian of the Year Award recipients at a ceremony at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney this evening.

The NSW Award recipients will join recipients from the other States and Territories as finalists for the national Awards to be announced on 25 January 2017 in Canberra.

The 2017 NSW Australian of the Year is a refugee and criminal lawyer, Deng Adut.
At the age of six, Deng Adut was snatched from his mother and forced to fight in the war that eventually split his homeland of Sudan. Deng was eventually smuggled out of Sudan into Kenya before making it to Australia in 1998. Deng’s life journey has taken him from an illiterate child soldier to a criminal lawyer making a difference in Western Sydney. His remarkable story has spread around the world and has inspired millions of people, thanks to a viral video made by his alma mater, Western Sydney University. Now studying for a second Master’s degree, Deng co-founded AC Law Group and fights for members of the Sudanese community from his home in Blacktown. While his life is now a long way from the privations of his childhood, Deng inspires others with his story of triumph over tragedy, and of the contributions that refugees can make to Australia’s rich community.

The 2017 NSW Senior Australian of the Year is 89 year old doctor and altruist, Dr John Knight AM.
Australia’s first celebrity doctor, Dr John Knight AM has spent decades amassing a residential property portfolio that supports elderly Australians. John, also known as Dr James Wright, answered the nation’s medical queries in print, radio and as a regular guest on Midday with Ray Martin for 30 years. In 1973, John and his late wife Noreen established Medi-Aid Centre Foundation, a charity that provides accommodation for the elderly, particularly those who are frail, have no family support and no home. Now at 89, John has battled through heartbreak, personal and financial loss and cancer, but he’s kept buying property for Medi-Aid and now has almost 1,000 investments – including hundreds of Surfers Paradise waterfront apartments – that are rented out for a meagre sum. While John could afford to live in luxury, he chooses to live in the same un-renovated home where he raised his four children and has lived for the past 60 years.

The 2017 NSW Young Australian of the Year is 27 year old reconciliation champion, Arthur Alla.
While volunteering for a year in Cape York, Arthur Alla listened to the wisdom of Aboriginal elders and wanted other young people to gain the same opportunity. So in 2011, Arthur set up Red Earth, an organisation that gives Indigenous Australians from remote homelands a way to host young people from the city. For two weeks, high school students live with traditional owners and local kids, volunteering on projects and learning about the world’s oldest enduring culture. Arthur’s work is deeply rooted in reconciliation: elders show their country with pride, telling their stories with their own voice, and choosing the projects that will add the most value to their homelands. Aboriginal children make friends and gain insights into life in the city, while visiting high school students open their hearts to first Australians. Arthur’s work has connected 1,100 students who have contributed 25,000 hours to projects and raised more than half a million dollars for communities.
The 2017 NSW Local Hero is volunteer, Josephine Peter of Broken Hill.

Seven decades of volunteer work began in 1940, when seven-year-old Josephine Peter knitted her first pair of socks for Australia’s troops. Over the course of World War II, Josephine made 450 pairs of socks, starting a lifetime of dedication to others. Since then, she’s been a stalwart on parents’ committees and arts societies. She’s handed out how to vote cards at elections for 54 years. She sat on the board of Broken Hill’s Robinson College for 25 years, with seven years as president, and she was a volunteer tutor for more than a decade. She’s listened to people’s problems as a telephone counsellor, coordinated 22 debutante balls for Rotary and has supported the VIEW Club and Smith Family for 27 years. She’s driven thousands of kilometres in car rallies to raise funds for kidney health and to build a children’s cemetery in her hometown. At 83 years of age, Josephine’s volunteer efforts have not diminished, and her influence on the community of Broken Hill is unmatched.

The NSW Premier, Mike Baird, praised the 2017 NSW Australian of the Year Award recipients.

“The incredible contributions of these inspiring Australians is something that should be recognised and their example followed,” Mr Baird said

“These individuals have pursued their passions, helped so many people and as a result made us all proud”.

“I congratulate them all on their achievements and wish them the best of luck in the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards”.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Chris Kirby, said the NSW Award recipients are inspirational Australians.

“The NSW Award recipients show us the power of the human spirit and remind us all we have something to give,” said Mr Kirby.

Commonwealth Bank has proudly sponsored the Australian of the Year Awards for 37 years. Chief Executive Officer, Ian Narev, said it was an honour to acknowledge the NSW Award recipients.

“Commonwealth Bank congratulates Deng, John, Arthur and Josephine on becoming national finalists in the Australian of the Year Awards,” said Mr Narev.

“We are delighted to celebrate their achievements and we wish them all the best for the National Awards in January.”

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit australianoftheyear.org.au.

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EMBARGO NOTE: Media attending the Awards event may of course report award recipients as they are announced on stage OR follow Australian of the Year Awards on Twitter @ausoftheyear or Facebook for the awards announcements as they happen - once each award is announced, it can be reported.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards or members of the selection panel, visit www.australianoftheyear.org.au and http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/selection-panel-members/

Photos from the Awards announcement event can be downloaded as available from http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/media-enquiries/