



Media Release

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Poles apart but the Christmas spirit still burns brightly

Although the red earth and heat of Broken Hill is about as far away from the ice and snow of the North Pole as you can get, the Christmas pudding is still part of the Yuletide tradition in Far Western New South Wales – thanks to the ladies of the Broken Hill Women’s Auxiliary (BHWA).

Today, as they have done every October for the past 49 years, they will assemble to finish off the production of 2,000 handmade Christmas puddings. Much sought after by people right across Australia, they sell out quickly, with all the proceeds going to the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

For the past 87 years the RFDS, one of the world’s oldest aeromedical organisations, has saved lives and delivered vital primary healthcare to people in remote, rural and regional Australia. Last year it helped over 280,000 people or one every two minutes.

“It’s always a huge challenge, more so as many of us are well into our 60’s and 70’s now, but we’re an experienced team and I’m confident that the ladies of the Auxiliary will rise to the occasion - as will their puddings,” said BHWA President, Margaret Symes.

“For the next two weeks we’ll be cooped up in a small room from 7am to 3.30pm mixing, kneading and steaming over 200 puddings a day.”

“They have been made the same way for almost half a century, using a secret recipe, which gives them a light and fluffy consistency, as opposed to the denser, heavier traditional puddings.”

Sadly history does not record who came up with the idea of making Christmas puddings, but the first record dates back to 1956 when 75 puddings were made at a member’s home.

Over the years the puddings have been made in: hotel kitchens, an old pathology building at a hospital, North Mine Ambulance Room, a staff room and cafeteria at another mine. They now have a room specially fitted out for them at the Perilya Mine, which means they no longer have to empty the 17 huge coppers of boiling water at the end of each day using buckets and a sink.

“It’s great to see the community spirit that got the BHWA started over 50 years ago still burns as brightly today,” said Brendon Smyth, General Manager of Marketing and Fundraising for the RFDS’ South Eastern Section (RFDS SE).

“The additional funds we need to raise each year on top of our Commonwealth and state government allocations, enable us to deliver and grow our range of healthcare and emergency services to meet an ever-increasing demand.”

“They have been stalwart supporters for almost as long as the RFDS SE has been in Broken Hill.”

Formed in 1951 by a group of local wives and mothers, the BHWA is extremely active, organising an annual ball, holding raffles, street stalls and selling hampers.

The BHWA has raised over \$1.5m to support the Flying Doctor since its inception and over \$85,000 in the past year alone.

In 2014 their decades of dedicated service was recognised with the NSW Volunteer Team of the Year Award.

“The Auxiliary exemplify the Australian volunteering spirit, without which life in this wide brown land of ours would be infinitely harder and more perilous,” said Mr Smyth.

“Making all those puddings is an incredible feat and has become a great Christmas tradition - even in the most unlikely of places.”

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For more information or photographs, contact:
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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section flew the equivalent of 6.25 round trips to the moon as it conducted over 5,000 clinics, took over 6,000 telehealth calls, had over 53,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,400 patients.