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From Locum to Local Legend: Manjimup's "Thousand Baby" Doctor Honoured for 50 Years of Rural Service

When Dr John Rosser Davies arrived in Manjimup in 1978 as a temporary locum, he had no idea he was beginning a relationship that would last a lifetime. Nearly five decades later, that "short stay" has become one of the most remarkable stories in rural Australian medicine.

Next month, Dr Davies will receive a Rural Health Long Service Award recognising 50 years of service to regional Western Australia - a milestone that reflects not just endurance, but deep connection, compassion and commitment to community.

Throughout his career, he has supported families through life's happiest beginnings and their most difficult goodbyes, pioneering home-based palliative care long before it became widely recognised in Australia.

In a career spanning obstetrics, anaesthetics, surgery, emergency medicine and aged care, Dr Davies has done what few doctors in Australia have ever achieved - he is recognised as the only rural doctor in Western Australia to have provided surgical, anaesthetic and obstetric services concurrently. As Manjimup's only obstetrician for 19 years, he has delivered more than 1,000 babies, often later caring for those same children as adults - and sometimes delivering their children too.

But for Dr Davies, it has never been about numbers. It's always been about the people, and one of his greatest legacies has been ensuring that rural medicine continues beyond him.

Dr Davies has mentored more than 80 medical students over his career, with 12 progressing to GP registrar training and two choosing to stay in Manjimup long term. Today, the town benefits from a strong, multi-doctor workforce, something that once seemed impossible.

Education has been a constant thread throughout his life. As a long-standing faculty member and Co-Convenor at the University of Western Australia's Clinical Training and Evaluation Centre (CTEC), Dr Davies has helped train countless doctors through the renowned Cutting Edge workshops, earning CTEC Platinum Convenor status for his exceptional contribution.

His care has always extended beyond hospital walls too. Dr Davies served as Treasurer of the Asthma Foundation, delivered antenatal and first-aid education, and for more than 15 years, has conducted the RISK (Risk Intervention to Save Kids) Road Safety Program, teaching Year 11 students about emergency department situations resulting from motor vehicle accidents. His aim is to help young drivers understand the real-world consequences of unsafe decisions, and impart valuable knowledge on other road dangers, including driving on gravel roads, the risks associated with alcohol and drugs, and the perils of distracted driving.

Dr Davies has also served as President of the Manjimup Rotary Club, quietly contributing to projects that strengthened the fabric of the community he loves.

Recognition has followed - including the 2017 Rural Health West Above and Beyond - Community First Award and, in 2024, Joint GP of the Year at the WA Rural Health Excellence Awards.

He speaks with gratitude about the generations of families he has cared for, and about the privilege of serving a town that values loyalty, trust and long-term relationships.

As he receives his Rural Health Long Service Award, Manjimup is not just celebrating a doctor - it is celebrating a neighbour, a mentor, a leader and a constant presence through 50 years of shared history.

Dr John Rosser Davies' story is proof that rural medicine is not defined by isolation or limitation, but by connection, courage and community.

And in Manjimup, his legacy will be felt for generations to come.

Media contact:

Lynn Loganathan
Rural Health West
0434 396 500

Media notes

The WA Rural Health Long Service Awards, presented annually by Rural Health West in partnership with the WA Country Health Service (WACHS), acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary commitment of general practitioners and medical specialists who have devoted decades of service to rural and remote communities across Western Australia. These awards honour milestones of 20, 30, 40 and 50 years of service, recognising clinicians who have provided sustained and often multi-generational care in country settings.

Since their origin in 2008 (initially known as the WA Country Doctors Awards), the Long Service Awards have become a respected tradition in the rural health sector, reflecting the resilience and dedication of health professionals working in geographically dispersed and often challenging environments. In 2017, WACHS formally joined Rural Health West in co-hosting the awards, strengthening the collaboration to acknowledge service excellence and longevity in rural healthcare.

The awards highlight not only years of service but also the deep community connections and impact these clinicians have had in improving health outcomes across regional and remote Western Australia.