

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Geelong GPs honoured for their service**

The 2009 Victorian Rural Doctors' Awards acknowledged Geelong GPs John Sowerby and John Beaumont for their commitment to the region, at a ceremony in Melbourne on the weekend.

Doctor Sowerby received an award for his 35 Years of Service and doctor Beaumont for his Outstanding Contribution to rural communities.

Victorian rural doctors were nominated by their peers, patients and local community members in three categories, 35 Years Service to Rural Communities, for *Outstanding Contribution to Rural Communities* or as a *New Rural Doctor*.

Health Minister, Hon. Daniel Andrews presented the doctors and their families with the awards in front of 225 guests at a gala dinner.

Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) chief executive Claire Austin explains the Awards' significance.

"The Awards provide an opportunity to pause and reflect on the contributions that our doctors and their families make to Victoria.

"Additionally, the Awards offer Victorians a way of saying 'thanks' to a corner stone of the population that sustain local communities in so many ways," Ms Austin said.

The 2009 Award recipients were from all corners of the state including, Sale, St Leonards, Moe, Elmore, Lorne, Ouyen, Trafalgar, Mount Beauty, Beechworth, Wangaratta, Portland, Lakes Entrance, Sale, Benalla, Phillip Island, Traralgon and Camperdown.

RWAV chairman Dr Philip Webster also paid tribute to this year's recipients.

"As is the nature of general practice and medicine these contributions have been diverse and broad ranging.

"Amongst all the recipients honoured, the common thread was doctors sustaining their local community," Dr Webster said.

An awards panel comprising RWAV, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Australian College of Rural & Remote Medicine, Rural Doctors Association of Victoria Australian Medical Association Vic and Rural Medical Family Network representatives assessed nominees against the criteria for each of the categories.

The Awards were proudly sponsored by Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA), a statutory body established to provide risk management consultancy, insurance and site risk surveys to Victorian State Government departments and agencies.

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**Media contact:**

Samantha Marnell: 0439 551 720  
RWAV media & communications coordinator

**Background information**

**Dr John Sowerby** – recognised for over 35 years service to rural communities

I am from the Goulburn Valley but grew up in suburban Melbourne.

After I graduated, the lure of rural life proved strong so I started my career in Warrnambool. In my Victorian regional career, I have lived and worked in Portland, Koroit, Apollo Bay, Queenscliff and St Leonards where I was for more than 31 years.

My areas of special interest would be family and community medicine. There have been many highlights – in 1999 I diagnosed the first case of Bairnesdale Ulcer on the Bellarine Peninsula. I started the first community health service in Australia from Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff in 1976.

But it is the programs I've worked on of which I am most proud. For example, in St Leonards, I developed a walking program as people were having heart attacks and uncontrollable diabetes. We called it 'Walk and Talk'. The program moved to Geelong and then went Australia wide. Very gratifying.

In the area of mental health, I did the necessary studies and started small group support teams. We targeted heroin addicted people and got them to join methadone programs.

With the elderly, I have long been an advocate of residents becoming more active. I worked on a program of community interaction. We also found that many were falling out of bed and breaking their hips due to lack of Vitamin D. Once they got some sun, we saw decreased numbers of breakages and improved health and wellbeing.

These days, I have retired officially as a GP. But in 2008, I started my "retirement job". I saw a niche in Belmont for a long-hours, acute bulk billing practice, so I took on the Belmont Bulk Billing Clinic. It fulfills a real community need and takes the weight off the other services. It also gives me the chance to fill the gaps when I want to. You can't be a doctor all your life and then just stop!

*"The tangible results I've seen from programs I've worked on in rural general practice have been extremely motivating and rewarding," Dr Sowerby said.*

**Dr John Beaumont** – recognised for his Outstanding Contribution to Rural Communities

I was born and bred in the city but when I was a medical student I bought a motorcycle – my friends and I loved riding off into the country for weekends. That started my love for the bush.

After I graduated, I travelled and worked overseas. I came home and did several years as a hospital medico, working at many different specialties. I did many locums and then joined an inner suburban practice in Melbourne where I worked mostly in Fitzroy.

It got to the point where I pondered my future. I decided I loved the diversity of all medical disciplines. Combining that with a desire to live in the bush, rural practice seemed the right path for me.

So 25 years ago I bought a solo medical practice in the beautiful coastal town of Lorne. I also became the VMO to an eight bed public hospital so I could do obstetrics, anaesthetics, minor surgery, accident and emergency medicine as well as take my own x-rays. Of course doing all this in a rural setting involved being on call all the time. Especially difficult in a holiday town like Lorne! But no matter how tired I was, my attitude was that this was part of the deal.

My message to any young doctor contemplating a rural career is that rural medicine offers great rewards in terms of the excellent variety of work, the many interesting characters you meet, the wonderful network of a small community, and a gratifying country lifestyle with no traffic lights.

*“The positives of rural medical practice far outweigh the negatives. I enjoy the commitment. I enjoy the challenge of an emergency. I enjoy teaching medical students and Registrars. I also enjoy running my own small business”*

**About RWAV** – Rural Workforce Agency Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation working with communities that have underserved health needs. We do this through a number of initiatives that recruit, support and advocate for the health workforce throughout rural and regional Victoria. [rwav.com.au](http://rwav.com.au)