

MEDIA RELEASE

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Inspiring graduates honoured

Five distinguished graduates of the University of Newcastle have been honoured by their peers with prestigious alumni awards for their inspiring achievements.

The President of the Executive Committee of Alumni, Mr Brian Kennaugh, said the annual awards recognised graduates who had demonstrated innovation and creativity, exceptional leadership and inspired others through their achievements.

Two new awards were created in 2009 to acknowledge the calibre of graduates demonstrating leadership regionally and nationally.

The Convocation Medal for Professional Excellence

The Convocation Medal for Professional Excellence is awarded to a graduate with an outstanding record of professional excellence in leadership, knowledge and/or professional practice.

Recipient: Professor Peter Silburn

Professor Silburn's groundbreaking work in the field of neuroscience and stem cell technology is offering fresh hope internationally to sufferers of Parkinson's disease as well as a wide range of neurodegenerative diseases. He is the Foundation Professor of Clinical Neuroscience at the University of Queensland. His research group is pioneering Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) in an effort to improve treatment for a wide range of neurodegenerative diseases including Parkinson's disease and Tourette Syndrome. Professor Silburn is a member of Australia's peak medical research advisory body, the Research Committee of the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Newton-John Award

The Newton-John Award is presented to a graduate displaying innovation or creativity in any field that has improved life, particularly in the Newcastle or Hunter region.

Recipient: Robin McDonald (this will be posthumously awarded)

In her role as economist at the Hunter Valley Research Foundation (HVRF), Ms McDonald established herself as an authoritative commentator on the Hunter region's economy and researched and published the HVRF's renowned *Hunter Economic Indicators* for more than 15 years. Her work involved monitoring and evaluating the economies of the Hunter region, Central Coast, NSW and Australia. In times of uncertainty, such as when BHP closed its steelmaking plant in Newcastle, Ms McDonald's research provided important facts to help the region make decisions about its future.

Alumni Award for Exceptional Community Service

The Alumni Award for Exceptional Community Service recognises the work of an outstanding individual who has made a significant contribution to the University or Hunter communities.

Recipient: Pippa Robinson

Ms Robinson is Coordinator of the Arts for Health program at the John Hunter Hospital. Her role encourages the hospital's community of specialist staff, patients, family and visitors to experience the value that creative activities - such as art exhibitions, performances and cultural events - can have in improving health. She is recognised for her ongoing commitment to building a professional arts community in Newcastle that nurtures young art students. In a previous role as the inaugural Director of Wattspace, she was instrumental in creating a university gallery that 20 years on is highly regarded nationally and internationally.

Alumni Award for Leadership (National) – NEW in 2009

The Alumni Award for Leadership (National) recognises an outstanding graduate who has made significant contributions as a leader in business, commerce, industry or public service.

Recipient: Ross Gittins

Mr Gittins has worked as a finance journalist and columnist for more than 30 years. He is considered to be Australia's leader in helping ordinary Australians understand economics. He has shared his outstanding ability to translate significant economic issues into something that is user-friendly and accessible through his regular newspaper columns, books and frequent public speaking engagements. His contribution to journalism as a commentator on economic theory, policy and behavioural economics was recognised last year when he was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia.

Alumni Award for Leadership (Regional) – NEW in 2009

The Alumni Award for Leadership (Regional) recognises an outstanding graduate who has made significant contributions as a leader in business, commerce, industry or public service.

Recipient: Jeff McCloy

CEO of the McCloy Group, Jeff McCloy has built a reputation as a massive contributor to property development and infrastructure in the Hunter region. A significant supporter of research at the University, Mr McCloy was the first Chair of the University of Newcastle Foundation. He was pivotal in establishing the University Foundation Scholarship scheme and active in developing sporting partnerships and facilities for the University. He has held a number of community positions including committee member of the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal (Hunter), Patron of the Redhead Surf Life Saving Club, and member of Newcastle Knights Player Retention Committee.

The Alumni Awards will be presented on Wednesday 14 October 2009 at 6pm in the Hunter Room, Newcastle City Hall. To organise interviews with Brian Kennaugh or recipients, please contact Kate Reid on 02 4921 5351.