

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE23090765

Kellett, Joan Mary OAM

(1929 - 2017)

Born 19290502, Brisbane Queensland Australia

Died 20170620, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Community activist, Sports administrator

Summary

Joan Kellett's community activism focused on the education and welfare of children in the ACT. In 1977 she established one of Australia's first after-school programs and a home for the Australian Early Childhood Association in the Majura Primary School, Watson. She served as Chair of the school board at North Ainslie Primary School and on the boards of Lyneham High School and Dickson College. For 30 years from 1984, she was an executive member of the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations. Her dedication to the sport of swimming as an administrator and official, and her contribution to the Canberra community, was recognised by the award of the Order of Australia Medal in 2003.

Joan Kellett was inscribed on the ACT Honour Walk in 2018.

Details

“Joan Mary Kellett was born in Brisbane on 2 May 1929, the eldest daughter of Gertrude and Alec Bell. She lived with her family above their pharmacy in Logan Road, Greenslopes and attended the local public primary school. She completed her secondary education at All Hallows Catholic school in Brisbane before studying science at the University of Queensland. She worked as a pathology biochemist at the Mater Hospital, Brisbane, and at Lewisham Hospital, Sydney, before marrying Harry Kellett in 1957. Following Harry’s appointment to the plumbing department of Canberra TAFE, the couple moved to Canberra with their young son in 1960, settled into their lifelong home in Dumaresq St, Dickson, and subsequently had three daughters. Joan devoted the rest of her life to promoting the education and welfare of children in the ACT.

Joan’s commitment to high quality public education and effective school management began in 1977, when she established one of Australia’s first after-school programs and a home for the Australian Early Childhood Association in the Majura Primary School, Watson. As resources officer she maintained a library on education strategies and policy. She served as Chair of the school board at North Ainslie Primary School and joined the boards of Lyneham High School and Dickson College. For 30 years from 1984, she was an executive member of the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations and was awarded life membership of that body in 2003. In this role she formulated policy, prepared submissions and represented the Council’s views on several government advisory committees. From 1984-89 she was the Council’s elected nominee on the ACT Schools Authority (later the ACT Education Council), and took on the Teachers’ Union to ensure that parents’ representatives had a say in the appointment of school principals. She was a founding member of the Education Council’s Disability Working Group and for 12 years the Council’s delegate member of the Turner School Board, and for a time its Chair, retiring in 2015.

Believing that drowning was one of the principal causes of children’s death, Joan was determined that all ACT children should be water-safe by the time they finished primary school. In 1967, the Kellett family joined the Dickson Swimming Club, with both Joan and Harry taking leadership roles in its administration and volunteering in coaching and officiating duties. Joan initiated a free Learn-to-Swim program at the pool and changed the focus of the Dickson swimming club from competitive swimming to be a more inclusive community-based body. Over the next 50 years Joan promoted the sport through leadership in several peak swimming organisations. From 1981 to 1985 she was an office bearer in the ACT Swimming Council, President of the Capital Territory Amateur Swimming Association (later Swimming ACT) in 1985, and its Secretary until 2004. In this role Joan had input into the construction of a number of public facilities, including the learners’ pool at Dickson. Noticing how few women were involved in sports administration, she became involved in the Women in Sport Committee for many years. As member of the Minister’s Advisory Committee for Sports and Recreation, and its Chair for three years, she lobbied for the construction of pools in Tuggeranong and Belconnen and was instrumental in the development of Swimming ACT’s program for people with disabilities. An accredited race official, she officiated at events from local club competitions and school carnivals to Special Olympic meets and country, state and national swimming championships, clocking up more hours officiating at swimming events than any other person in the ACT. A volunteer at the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2000, she headed the swimming working party for the 2008 Pacific School Games. Her dedication to the sport of swimming as an administrator and official, and her contribution to the Canberra community, was recognised by the award of the Order of Australia Medal in 2003. In 2010 she received Life Membership of Dickson Swimming Club and was named Volunteer of the Year. In 2011 she was awarded the title of ACT Sportstar of the Year and given Associate Membership of the ACT Sport Hall of Fame. Joan also volunteered for 20 years with the Girl Guides as a Brownie unit leader and later Division Commissioner, served on the Board of the YMCA from 2002 to 2016 and volunteered with the social program run by Alzheimer’s Australia from 2006 to 2016.

Joan stood unsuccessfully for the first ACT Government election in 1989 on the Residents Rally ticket. Before the election she had collaborated with the Rally’s founder, Michael Moore, in developing the Party’s philosophy relating to the balance of power. She was particularly influential in preventing cuts to the education budget and was, Moore observed, ‘a somewhat understated but powerful influence’ on Canberra’s politics. Her belief in the importance of community input to planning and development inspired her to chair the North Canberra Community Council in 1994-95 and 2004, and to become a member of the Majura Local Area Planning Advisory Committee. She attended hearings in the ACT Assembly and represented the Council in a variety of fora. In 2010 she helped form the Dickson Residents Group and remained a member for the rest of her life, working to maintain a balance between development and the preservation of the character and amenity of the neighbourhood. She valued Canberra’s heritage, serving as a committee member of the Friends of the Albert Hall for several years. She appreciated the cultural institutions of Canberra, holding long time memberships of the Friends of the National Library and the National Gallery of Australia.

An unassuming woman with exceptional skills as a listener, her empathetic nature made her an effective and influential agent in her various spheres of action and earned her many friends. ‘I just see myself as someone who sees things to be done and thinks how I can do them’, she once observed. She died in Canberra on 20 June 2017, leaving four children and nine grandchildren. About 350 mourners attended her memorial service. Her name was inscribed on the ACT Honour Walk in 2018.”

Published resources

ACT Government website,
<https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/women/awards/act-womens-honour-roll/2011/joan-kellett-oam>

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