

Angels among us

Story: Casey O'Connor

Many would be familiar with the TV advertisements for Angel Flight but few would be aware of the valuable assistance this amazing group of volunteers provide in our community or that they are within our own region.

The Stanthorpe Rotary Club had a unique chance for an up close and personal insight into Angel Flight, how it works and who is involved earlier this week, after a visit from Lance Smith AM and volunteer pilot and Stanthorpe local, Mike Roselt.

Mr Smith explained that unlike their more recognisable cousins the Royal Flying Doctors, Angel Flight do not provide emergency medical assistance. Angel Flight pilots do not carry aero medical staff or medical equipment and do not act as an alternative to the Flying Doctor (RFDS) or Air Ambulance.

Angel Flight Australia, co-ordinates non-emergency flights for financially and medically needy people. Thanks to the generosity of over 2,000 aircraft owners across the country, all flights are free and assist patients or compassionate carers travelling to or from medical facilities anywhere in Australia.

One such pilot who flies under the radar in our local community is Mike Roselt. A Stanthorpe resident, Mike, who is limited in the number of flights he can make because his plane can only carry one passenger, has now made nine Angel Flights including



Stanthorpe Rotary Club members acknowledge Stanthorpe Angel Flight volunteer pilot Mike Roselt.

round trips from Toowoomba to Cunnamulla, often covering over 1,200kms in a flight.

He explained that pilots and aircraft must meet strict criteria. "All pilots must be CASA approved as do their aircraft. Pilots have to have 250 hours pilot in command hours and meet strict medical guidelines but it is one of the most rewarding experiences."

The completely self-funded service group relies on individual donations and corporate sponsorship. They operate this marvellous service with only six paid employees, ensuring that 85 cents

in every dollar donated is spent on aviation fuel, flight costs and planning. To help offset the pilots' operating costs, Angel Flight negotiates the waiver of landing fees at airports around the country.

This year Angel Flight was one of the beneficiaries of a \$10,000 donation from Ballandean Estate and The Rotary club of Stanthorpe's Opera in the Vineyard, presented on Tuesday.

While Angel Flight does not hold fundraising events, they are the main beneficiary of the Outback Trailblazer event co-

ordinated by Lance Smith. The seven-day event held in October is filled with action packed days of outback fun and adventure.

Ballandean Estate's Angelo Puglisi who, along with his wife Mary, joined last year's odyssey said, "It's something everyone should do. We had a ball and helped raised funds for such an amazing cause. Pack your swag and have some fun."

More information on Outback Trailblazer is available from the website www.outbacktrailblazer.com.au or Lance Smith 0408 428 385.