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Karen West wins Unsung Hero award

Karen West, a Kalkadoon elder from Mornington Island and Senior Aboriginal Health Worker and Team Leader there, last night received the Friends of the Alliance Unsung Hero award.

The Unsung Hero is awarded by the Friends of the National Rural Health Alliance to someone who has contributed in a major way to local issues, who has worked tirelessly for others, and whose contribution to their local area leaves those communities immeasurably richer.

Karen West is on call 24 hours a day and has the reputation of going where others fear to tread, actively seeking out people in need. “The work sounds hard,” she said last night at the 12th National Rural Health Conference, “but I love it.” She modestly accepted her award, at the 12th National Rural Health Conference dinner, insisting that “there are many people who do what I do. There are doctors, health workers, podiatrists and others. We must all work as a team.”

Previous winners have included Kylie Stothers, a Katharine-based social worker, who won the Unsung Hero award in 2011 and “Uncle” Col Walker, an elder for the Yorta Yorta Nations People in Bahmah in Victoria. In 2011 another recipient was Peter Sergeant, recognised for his work in developing a sustainable program of “Men’s Sheds” for use in rural communities to help men suffering loneliness, isolation and poor mental health.

Friends of the Alliance is a membership body that supports the National Rural Health Alliance and the work they do. It consists of a network of people and organisations working to improve health and wellbeing in rural and remote Australia. The main aim of Friends is to support that work and to facilitate communication between those interested in health issues in rural and remote Australia.

More information on the Conference can be found at www.ruralhealth.org.au