

Our member profile this fortnight is Sarah Oaten. Sarah joined South Narrabeen SLSC in 1988 as a foundation Nipper. She has been a continuous member since that time and is our most recent member to be granted Life Membership, the first female.

Over the years, Sarah has held many positions at a Club level including Junior Captain, Club Captain, Chief Instructor and Secretary. She currently sits on the Committee as an Independent Director with the Member Services portfolio.

Sarah is pictured at South Narrabeen



When did you join South Narrabeen SLSC and why?

I joined in 1988 as a foundation Nipper. There were no Nippers at South Narrabeen SLSC prior to 1988. Why did I join? Because Dad was the President and I didn't really have a choice!

What are the key lessons that you've learnt from your time in South Narrabeen SLSC?

It is important to have a functioning Committee to guide the membership. Each member is additionally important but it is essential to have a strategic board to guide us.

I've grown up in the Surf Club through many eras – good and bad. At the end of the day we are all here to do our best, whether we all agree on the same way forward or not!

What's it like being on patrol and what do you enjoy about it?

Being on patrol has changed quite a bit since I started patrolling 20 seasons ago. For instance, there was a real rebellion towards wearing the patrol cap on the head and it was equally as challenging to get patrolling members to wear the shirt. They were usually too big, made of a hot heavy cotton and very uncomfortable to wear. It nice to see these days how proud Lifesavers are to wear the full uniform on patrol.

You've been a member at South Narrabeen SLSC for over 28 years, how have things changed?

Evolution will always happen and like any Surf Club things will change, people will come and go. The biggest change that I have witnessed over the years in the growth in our patrolling membership. When I gained my Surf Life Saving Certificate (now called the Surf Rescue Certificate) in 1995(ish) we had around 20 patrolling members, now we have near 70.

How is the 2016-2017 season going?

We are travelling along nicely. We were fortunate enough to receive a large (\$21K) grant from Manly Warringah Leagues Club which enabled us to update a lot of our Lifesaving equipment. Jake, Kylie, Grant, Brian and Mike have done an outstanding job with our education and our member awards look healthy. Competition wise, we have both an Open Men's and an Open Women's Boat Crew and a Junior Crew learning the ropes which outstanding for our small Club. We have also attracted upwards of 60 new members including Nippers, their parents and new Lifesavers.

What are your goals within Surf Life Saving, in particular South Narrabeen SLSC?

I honestly don't have any goals, I take opportunities as they come. I have been on and off the Club Committee for 15 years in various lifesaving, education, competition and administrative roles as well as sitting on Branch and State Boards. I do prefer to be involved at a Club level above anything else.

What has been your best memory as a surf lifesaver?

I have a few... the first being when I beat Stephen Smith as a Nipper in the swim! He was a gun on the sand and in the water so when I beat him I was stoked! It only took about 3 years of squad training at the Leagues Club!

The next was when I got my Bronze Medallion. Karen McElligott was our Training Officer and it was her first squad. She had a handful of new Junior Boat Rowers as well as myself and a few others who had come up through Nippers. For me, I had a blast. Karen is a great human.

I would have to say being selected to attend the SLSA National Leadership Camp in 2004 was another highlight. It was held at the Narrabeen Academy of Sport (every year before that was held at Lake Ainsworth so you can image my disappointment to learn that it was moved to just around the corner haha) During that camp we were tasked to come up with a Beach Management Plan for the Narrabeen-Collaroy stretch of beach and present the plan to the President of Surf Life Saving Australia and others. It must have been a success as the beach management plan that is in place to this day is a hybrid of what we came up with at the camp.

Lastly, was when I was bestowed the honour of Life Member of South Narrabeen SLSC in 2015. I was completely blindsided by it and very honoured.

Who is someone you admire in the Surf Life Saving movement and why?

I admire the women who have come before me in this movement. It is not always easy to pave the way as a woman in this organisation but I thank every woman who has come before me at South Narrabeen, including my Nan and Mum. It is because of these women that I, and others, can gain our Bronze Medallion, sit on Committees, have a voice, be Patrol Captains and leaders.

Anything else you would like to add...

I love that my daughter Ruby has joined Nippers this season. I hope she can make the same fond memories I have made at South Narrabeen.