

2026 Cootamundra Business Award Winners

Outstanding Young Business Leader Winner- (Under 35 years old)

Nick Ashe of Flemings Property Services.

Nick demonstrates effective leadership over a significant team while balancing dual responsibilities as both Office Director and Sales Manager. He remains actively involved in mentoring staff, implementing new systems and helping shape the future direction of the business.

Outstanding Business Leader Winner

Kerryn Crow - Cootamundra Pre – School

Kerryn's leadership, commitment to excellence and dedication to both staff and community stood out strongly with the judging panel.

To be recognised once is an outstanding accomplishment. To be recognised for a second year is a testament to the respect she has earned and the significant contribution she continues to make within our local business community.

Outstanding Employee Winner

This year's award has been declared a **joint winner**.

Tahnee Spencer – Sureway Employment

Tahnee supports participants facing disability, mental health challenges and long-term unemployment, helping vulnerable people achieve independence and employment while mentoring colleagues and embodying a true team approach.

Outstanding Employee Winner

Mick Levett – Conqueror Milling

Mick is described as indispensable. He keeps critical systems functioning, manages complex logistics and is respected for his adaptability, reliability and quiet leadership.

Outstanding News Business Winner

Maneki Neko Grocers.

The judges praised the business for introducing something truly unique to the region, celebrating cultural diversity and demonstrating impressive growth by opening a second location within just two years.

Excellence in Business

Dance With Miss Em

The judges described Dance With Miss Em as a powerful example of a regional business creating meaningful impact. Through inclusive programs and professional dance education, the business builds confidence, resilience and opportunity for people of all abilities.

Excellence in Business - Highly Commended

Milestone Early Learning Centre.

Milestone Early Learning Centre has established itself as a valued and trusted part of the local community, providing high-quality early childhood education and care in a welcoming, nurturing and inclusive environment.

The judges were particularly impressed by the centre's commitment to continuous improvement, the creation of engaging learning environments, and the genuine relationships developed with children, families and community organisations.

Their nomination highlighted a strong commitment to supporting not only the development of children in their care, but also the wellbeing of families and the broader community.

Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion Business

Intereach Cootamundra

The judges recognised that diversity and inclusion were not simply policies but were embedded into everyday practice through leadership, accessibility, cultural understanding and genuine commitment.

The judges were particularly impressed by the organisation's genuine commitment to creating a workplace and service environment where everyone feels welcome, respected and supported.

Outstanding Community Organisation

Lions Club of Cootamundra

For almost half a century, Lions have quietly and consistently supported our community. From fireworks and community events to Meals on Wheels, school vision screening and countless volunteer hours, their impact touches almost every corner of Cootamundra.

Outstanding Community Organisation - Highly Commended

Muttama Creek Regeneration

The judges were highly impressed by the work of the Muttama Creek Regeneration Group, an organisation that demonstrates the extraordinary impact a dedicated group of volunteers can have on their local environment and community.

Entirely volunteer-driven, the group has focused their efforts have transformed sections of the creek into healthier, more vibrant natural spaces that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

Outstanding Community Organisation - Highly Commended

Combined Churches 2590

The judges were deeply impressed by the impact that Combined Churches 2590 has on the lives of people throughout our community.

Their contribution can be seen through initiatives such as Carols in the Park, Special Religious Education programs in local schools, and the much-loved Christmas Day Luncheon . While these events are significant in their own right, it was the care shown through the Christmas Day Luncheon, particularly the delivery of meals to those unable to attend, that resonated strongly with the judges.

The organisation also provides practical support to individuals and families experiencing hardship and continues to explore new ways to respond to emerging community needs, including youth-focused initiatives and enhanced crisis support services.

Outstanding Customer Service – Business/Organisation

Smile On Clinics Cootamundra.

The judges recognised that visiting the dentist can be a source of fear and anxiety for many people. What impressed them most was the clinic's commitment to ensuring every patient feels welcomed, supported and comfortable from the moment they walk through the door. Smile On Clinics demonstrates that outstanding customer service is about making people feel valued, understood and supported, and for that reason they are a deserving recipient of this award.

Outstanding Customer Service – Business/Organisation - Highly Commended

Cootamundra Waste Facility

One of the most memorable submissions received by the judges came from a business that many people might not immediately associate with outstanding customer service.

The Cootamundra Waste Facility was described in just a few words that perfectly captured its approach: "**Professionalism with a touch of banter.**"

Those words resonated strongly with the judging panel because they reflected a team that understands customer service is not just about completing a task, it is about creating a positive experience for every person they interact with. Through their positive attitude, willingness to help and genuine connection with the community, the team at the Cootamundra Waste Facility has elevated an everyday service into something much more meaningful.

Outstanding Customer Service – Individual Winner

Billie-Jo Johnston of Intereach.

Billie-Jo's submission demonstrated that exceptional customer service can genuinely change lives. Supporting vulnerable families, carers and multicultural communities, her work extends far beyond individual interactions and creates meaningful community impact.

Outstanding Customer Individual - Highly Commended

Rod Jones – Imrie's Bus Service

For more than 40 years, Rod has been a familiar and trusted face within the community, dedicating his career to safely transporting generations of local children and providing a service that families have relied upon day after day, year after year.

Throughout his career, parents have entrusted him with what is most precious to them – their children. That level of trust is not earned overnight. It is built through consistency, reliability, professionalism and genuine care over many years.