

ST JOHN AMBULANCE — TOM PRICE AND ONSLOW

Statement

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [6.29 pm]: We owe a lot to the volunteers of St John Ambulance in Western Australia, and the annual St John Experience recognition ceremony, which was held earlier this month, is a small way of putting the community's appreciation for them on the record. I would like to recognise two of the award recipients who are especially close to the hearts of the residents of Tom Price and Onslow.

Volunteer ambulance officers attend emergency situations, patient transfers, public events and training, and deal with a range of other situations related to running such a valuable service. They give up their personal time to do so, and our whole community benefits from that service.

I was especially proud to learn last week that Tom Price local Michael Napier was awarded the Volunteer of the Year—Country Operations award in 2022. St John WA recognised Michael for his generosity of spirit and excellence in the field when serving the Pilbara communities of Tom Price and Paraburdoo. Michael serves as an emergency medical technician and has volunteered for St John in WA for 19 years, but this barely begins to describe his contribution. He is the epitome of the phrase “above and beyond”, attending more than 100 jobs and first aid events each year. He is the vice-chair of the St John Tom Price sub-centre board and attends every training session across multiple locations. Michael was also made a member of the Order of St John back in 2016. Not content with attending numerous jobs and committee meetings, he also dedicates numerous days off to building and vehicle maintenance at the sub-centre. In his spare time—how he has any is a mystery—he organises social meet-ups for volunteers at different response locations.

Michael has also been hard at work teaching the Tom Price Senior High School emergency service cadets how to recognise and respond to emergency situations, taking them through simulated exercises to help develop the next generation of EMTs. In the last 19 years, Michael—or “Tiny”, as we all know him—who is well-respected and regarded in Tom Price, has helped countless residents, fly-in fly-out workers and tourists, directly or indirectly saving lives. I know that my community is more vibrant, healthier and safer for his work. His award of Volunteer of the Year could not be more thoroughly deserved and I congratulate him for it.

Just down the road from Tom Price—in country terms, at least—Onslow sub-centre was awarded the Sub Centre of the Year award at the same ceremony. Regional ambulance services are provided through sub-centres at 160 different regional locations, 120 of which are entirely run by volunteers, with others staffed by a combination of volunteer medical officers and career paramedics. In smaller locations like Onslow, they are staffed entirely by volunteers, who are provided with ambulances, equipment, buildings, training and administrative support from St John supported by the WA government. The importance of these services and the value of volunteers cannot be overstated. Running an ambulance service is a complex and difficult task, regardless of the location. Running one in a small town in the Pilbara comes with a unique set of challenges.

Stretching from Yannarie to Fortescue, the Onslow sub-centre is a small operation that handles a very big job. The sub-centre is led by 26 volunteers, who dedicate themselves to the community through their work, responding to about 150 jobs a year. With the next sub-centre three hours away, the Onslow sub-centre provides an essential service to us in the north west. The sub-centre was also the recipient of the Onslow Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's People's Choice Award in 2021, and several of the volunteers were recognised for their outstanding contributions in 2022 through the Shire of Ashburton's Volunteer of the Month awards.

Thanks to a number of government grants, the sub-centre has been able to obtain equipment used in training with volunteer marine rescue, volunteer fire and emergency services, the Western Australia Police Force and Onslow Hospital, as well as upgrade its specialist ambulance.

Volunteering always sustains and strengthens our local communities. The volunteers who keep our emergency services viable go above and beyond. Many people would literally not be here today if it were not for their dedication and work. St John WA reports that its operations are delivered thanks to 4 500 volunteers donating over three million hours of their time and effort each year. We could not do it without them.

I would like to thank Mr Napier and the volunteers at the Onslow sub-centre, and those doing the same work in sub-centres across regional WA, for their great work. Our regional communities are stronger and safer because of your efforts and you can be rightly proud of the contribution that you all make.