

Australian STUD & STABLE STAFF AWARDS 2020

Supported by



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and hard work
Wednesday, 17 June,
7.30pm AEST



Australian Turf Club





WELCOME

On behalf of Racing Australia and Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, we welcome you to the sixth Australian Stud & Stable Staff Awards ceremony, supported by Godolphin.

Although this ceremony is being staged online in 2020, the dedication to the industry remains unaltered and it gives us great pleasure, in particular, to congratulate the awards finalists: Simon Johnson, Michael Shepherdson, Brett Killion, Michael Hurry, Chris Cooper, Martin Bruechert, Mandy Radecker, Wendy Smith, Sarah Moran, Tetsuhito Hirose, Jade Willis, Liz Andriske, Kelly Colledge and Alyssa Pickels. We wish each of you good luck.

In addition, we are delighted to acknowledge board members and representatives from Racing Australia, Thoroughbred Breeders Australia and from our Award sponsors, Magic Millions, Melbourne Racing Club Foundation and the Australian Turf Club.

Our thanks go to all those in the various sectors of Australian racing and breeding who put forward nominations. A record 168 nominations were received – from all over the country and from the widest-ever range of training establishments, studs and other organisations that support and maintain an industry that is one of Australia's largest.

As we all know, the hard work and commitment of staff is the cornerstone of our industry. Without that, Australia would not be regarded as a global leader in thoroughbred racing and breeding.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the judges for the huge part they have played in adjudicating and selecting the winners in each category.

And a special thank you to His Highness Sheikh Mohammed and Godolphin for their continued support of the Australian racing and breeding industry, particularly through these Awards. We look forward to this event continuing for many years to come as the pinnacle of staff awards in our industry.

In closing, we wish all the winners and runners-up the very best for the future. You should all be very proud to be a finalist.

Greg Nichols
Chairman



Tom Reilly
Chief Executive Officer



SPONSOR'S MESSAGE

On behalf of Godolphin, we are delighted to sponsor the Stud & Stable Staff Awards for the sixth year in Australia. Racing and breeding are the lifeblood of many communities in Australia, and the way all have worked together through Covid-19 to ensure we, as an industry, continue has been nothing short of remarkable.

Godolphin is a global sponsor of these Awards which are now hosted in the UK, Ireland, France, America and here in Australia. In 2020, we had a record number of nominations and the standard of individuals in all categories was of the highest calibre, giving the judges a tough task in choosing the winners for each category. These Awards are arguably the premier staff awards in Australian racing and breeding, and we are proud to join with other leading organisations within our industry to bring these to you year in, year out.

When a horse wins at the highest level, or a maiden in the country, we all know that is just part of the story. Before passing the winning line, there have been countless hours of hard work, often in tough conditions, all carried out by those who are generally unrecognised beyond their own studs and yards.

The aim of these Awards is to celebrate those unsung heroes – from those working on stud farms foaling down

or prepping yearlings, to those in training yards or ancillary services, and everyone in between who plays a part in delivering our great sport to the public. These Awards honour the behind-the-scenes stars of our industry and bring deserved recognition and reward to the people who make an extraordinary commitment to our horses and this sport.

I'd like to thank Racing Australia and Thoroughbred Breeders Australia for their enthusiasm, support and sponsorship of the Australian Awards. More specifically, thank you to the teams at those organisations for their support over the past few months in making sure these Awards happened. Thanks also to the members of the shortlisting and judging panels for their diligent work in selecting the finalists and, ultimately, the winners. Our Award sponsors have also been fantastic, so thanks to: Magic Millions, Melbourne Racing Club Foundation, Australian Turf Club and Sky Racing channel, for their support of the 2020 Stud & Stable Staff Awards.

Congratulations to all the finalists and winners.

Vin Cox
Managing Director (Australia)



AUSTRALIAN STUD & STABLE STAFF AWARDS 2020 FINALISTS

Administration and Ancillary Services

SPONSORED BY



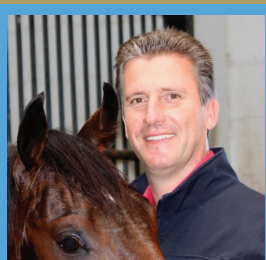
Sarah Moran
Griffiths Racing



Tetsuhito Hirose
IRT

Dedication to Breeding

SPONSORED BY



Martin Bruechert
Coolmore



Chris Cooper
Godolphin

Horsemanship



Mandy Radecker
Michael Lakey



Wendy Smith
Blue Gum Farm

Leadership



Simon Johnson
Godolphin



Michael Shepherdson
McEvoy-Mitchell Racing

Dedication to Racing

SPONSORED BY

Australian Turf Club



Michael Hurry
Victoria Racing Club



Brett Killion
Chris Waller Racing

Thoroughbred Care and Welfare



Jade Willis
JW Equestrian



Liz Andriske
Spare One
Thoroughbreds

Newcomer



Kelly Colledge
Brenden Mackay



Alyssa Pickels
Kitchwin Hills

ADMINISTRATION AND ANCILLARY SERVICES

SPONSORED BY



SARAH MORAN
GRIFFITHS RACING



TETSUHITO HIROSE
IRT

Administration and Ancillary Services finalists Sarah Moran and Tetsuhito Hirose, not surprisingly, come from vastly different backgrounds. And their roles in the racing industry are similarly diverse.

But both are vitally responsible in ensuring their businesses run smoothly and efficiently.

For Moran, the personal assistant to Victorian trainer Robbie Griffiths, her job is one that she came to as something of a novice 10 years ago, and one she has developed into a small business in its own right.

After working in a variety of racing-related jobs, including as a guide at the Victorian Racing Museum and in the office of trainer Robbie Laing, Moran joined the Griffiths team in 2010 as an office assistant.

Over the next few years she took on additional tasks, such as doing acceptances, booking jockeys, sending updates to owners, doing form analysis, marketing the yearlings her boss bought, organising the stable's social media accounts and helping create a stable magazine.

But it was in the past two years that Moran emerged as an even more vital link in the Griffiths operation.

In 2019, Griffiths was diagnosed with a brain aneurism and underwent major surgery last August.

An Award to an individual staff member who works in an administration role on a stud or in a racing yard or services ancillary to racing or breeding (such as Race Club administrators and staff, stud or stable administration staff, farm, garden and maintenance staff). Must demonstrate exceptional skills, loyalty or some achievement that has added value to their employer's business and directly or indirectly to industry standards.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.

"I was out of business for quite a while and during that time Sarah proved vital in keeping the business afloat," Griffiths said.

"Sarah had always been a keen and capable worker, always willing to turn her hand to whatever was needed. But during my illness we all realised the level of loyalty and devotion she was capable of. It was incredible. For her to win an award such as this would be a wonderful validation of a young woman's dedication to this industry."

For her part, Moran is simply delighted to be a candidate. "I'm humbled and excited. Like most people, I do what I can in my job and for that to be recognised is an absolute honour," she said.

Tetsuhito Hirose – "Hiro" – came to racing via an unorthodox path.

A university graduate in Japan where his first intention was to get into sports management, Hiro played top-level basketball in his home country, but was always looking for something different.

"I'd never really touched a horse, I was just hanging over the fence at the racecourse," he said.

"I knew there was a big racing industry in America and Europe, but when I saw horses like Horlicks and Better Loosen Up win the Japan Cup, I realised it must also be pretty big in Australia and New Zealand."

So it was, that against his family's wishes, he came to Australia in 1995 with no horse skills and a distinct lack of English.

Hiro initially gravitated to the Hunter Valley where he worked at any job that would help him gain knowledge. He was a jackaroo, float driver, feed man, horse breaker, and just about everything else, until he joined Gerald Ryan when he was based on the Queensland Gold Coast.

That job eventually led, in 2006, to an introduction to equine transport company IRT. Since then, his standing in the company has been on a steep incline. From groom to his present position as Operations Co-ordinator, Hiro has displayed a rare ability to go beyond the parameters of an already complex job.

Among his achievements was the development of a special relationship with the Japan Racing Association that proved instrumental in cutting through the red tape and solving quarantine issues to get the 2019 Cox Plate winner Lys Gracieux to Melbourne.

He also played a vital role in getting the Melbourne Cup winner Delta Blues and runner-up Pop Rock to the post at Flemington in 2006.

IRT Chairman Quentin Wallace, Hiro's nominator, summed him up: "Hiro's journey is a wonderful embodiment of how so many in the horse industry dedicate their lives to following their hearts and indulging their passion for the betterment of us all."

DEDICATION TO BREEDING

SPONSORED BY



MARTIN BRUECHERT
COOLMORE



CHRIS COOPER
GODOLPHIN

Between them, Martin Bruechert and Chris Cooper have devoted more than 60 years to the thoroughbred breeding industry, an effort that more than qualifies them as finalists in the Dedication to Breeding category.

But there is much more than long service to support the credentials of the two men who both work on Hunter Valley farms, Bruechert at Coolmore and Cooper at Godolphin's broodmare base, Woodlands.

Bruechert's career began at Lindsay Park in South Australia in 1985 and has included stints at Arrowfield, Coolmore in Ireland, Darley's Kelvinside stud, The Pines Stud in Victoria, Rheinwood Pastoral, Cressfield and, currently, at Coolmore's Australian farm at Jerry's Plains where he's spent the past six years.

His SSSA nominator, Coolmore colleague Max Nudd, described Bruechert as "the consummate horseman".

"Martin handles all situations on the farm, he's a brilliant pedigree analyst, a generous mentor, he has a great understanding of a mare's reproductive cycle. There is hardly a role he couldn't fill," Nudd said.

The position he occupies at Coolmore today is as a supervisor, weaning all the farm's foals and teaching them the basics of walking, leading and handling.

An Award to an individual staff member who has shown talent in thoroughbred breeding horsemanship as well as consistency and reliability in a stud role. Must have at least five years' service in the breeding industry and have been pivotal in his or her employer's success.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.

In previous roles he had 350 mares under his care at Arrowfield, looking after each of them personally from head to tail.

He also accompanied Danehill back to Coolmore in Ireland in 1994 and worked the season at the farm.

Bruechert's place among the final two in the Dedication to Breeding category of the SSSA is greeted with grace and gratitude.

"I can't thank the organisers enough for this sort of recognition. So many people working on farms and in stables are never noticed, so it's great when it happens," he said.

Chris Cooper's dedication to his industry is unquestionable.

He first worked at Woodlands when the farm was owned by the Ingham brothers and apart from a season spent at Widden Stud, he has been at the farm since 1994.

To Cooper, the opportunity to work with one of the country's finest broodmare bands is one thing, but to do so at Woodlands makes it all the more special.

"The entire atmosphere of the place is incredible. You see it in the reaction of people who come and visit, they are amazed," he said.

"For me it is more special because my wife and I have raised two kids here. It's much more than a place to work, it's in our souls."

Cooper's appreciation for the life Woodlands has given him is reciprocated in full.

His nominator, the farm's Assistant Manager Simon Johnson, regards Cooper as a man of "absolute dedication" that is demonstrated every day.

"It's normal to see Chris at work at first light every day and you'll find him driving through the paddocks each evening just before dark checking on his mares," Johnson said.

"He treats the place as he would if it were his own and the mares are like his own family."

Among that "family" are the mares who produce the horses that Godolphin races, as well as the retired broodmares like 32-year-old Excited Angel, a mare who won 12 races and produced nine winners, and Mnemosyne, a G1 winner herself and the mother of G1 winner Impending.

"Chris's love for the mares and his attention to detail has saved many lives. Everything he does is about caring for them and it is reflected in our broodmare band," Johnson said.

HORSEMANSHIP

An Award to an individual staff member who has shown talent for horsemanship, consistency and reliability in or out of the saddle. Must include an affinity with horses and give priority to animal welfare. Must demonstrate a degree of success with the thoroughbred, whether it be in breeding, or racing or both, that has been borne out of their particular skill set.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.



MANDY RADECKER
MICHAEL LAKEY

Mandy Radecker and Wendy Smith rank as two of the finest horsewomen in Australia.

They also add abundant proof to the theory that Australian racing and breeding would suffer badly if not for all of those whose talents and skills are so rarely celebrated.

Smith is the Yearling Manager at Blue Gum Farm, the Victorian stud where she has worked for the past eight years, having begun working with dressage and show horses in 1979.

She is also a veterinary nurse and in charge of post-natal care of Blue Gum's foals.

Smith's nominator, Patti Campbell, describes her as possessing "unlimited determination, thorough reliability and unsurpassed knowledge and skills".

"Wendy has a vast history of working with horses and today stands just as motivated, committed and passionate as she always has," Campbell said.

Smith is credited with being instrumental in Blue Gum's impressive yearling sale results over the past six years, a period in which the farm has always been among the top three vendors at the Inglis Premier Sale, finishing on top of the table three times.

"These results don't occur without great effort, commitment and personal sacrifice, and Wendy delivers all of that," Campbell said.

Smith, who also gives her time to local Riding for the Disabled groups, puts her relationship with her horses down to admiration and love.

"You do the work for the love of the horses," she said.

While she attributes the horses themselves for teaching her most of what she knows, Smith also accepts that she has one vital quality.

"I'm not in a bad mood very often. I think they like that."

Mandy Radecker's main role is head trackwork rider for Brisbane trainer Michael Lakey. But there is far more to the former champion apprentice jockey.

Radecker began her life in racing as a trainee stablehand with Cypmie trainer Kaye Hill while she was in Year 12.

Having taken to the game with considerable passion, she began an apprenticeship to prominent Brisbane trainer Pat Duff in 2004, only to have her soaring career jeopardised when she suffered shocking injuries in a race fall in April of that year.

With a broken neck, broken pelvis and fractured hip, her racing future looked to be in the balance, but Radecker was back in the saddle before the end of the season and was duly crowned Queensland's leading provincial apprentice.

She also finished second in that season's Brisbane metropolitan apprentices' championship, a title she won the following year when she was named the Ken Russell Queensland Apprentice of the Year.

Radecker retired from race riding in 2012, landing a winner in her last ride, and has since carved out a new life as a trackwork rider who specialises in turning problem horses around.

"As a kid, the only horses we had at home to ride were the ones other people were having trouble with, so I suppose I got a feel for them," she said.

"My approach now is that jockeys have a lot of split-second decisions to make so it's going to be a lot better for them if their horses aren't likely to be unpredictable.

"I know what it's like, so I want to make their job easier."

While she is already a celebrated horsewoman, Radecker said that becoming an SSSA finalist was a tremendous thrill.

"I was shocked and speechless when I was told I was in the last five. To now be one of the final two is such an honour," she said.

As well as her work on the training track, Radecker has served as President of the Bramble Bay Pony Club, is a horse breaker and, according to her boss, "the best horsewoman I've ever seen".



WENDY SMITH
BLUE GUM FARM

LEADERSHIP

An Award to an individual staff member in a managerial or supervisory role in a stud or stable, who has displayed leadership qualities – in particular, quality people management, mentoring and support of staff, attention to workplace health and safety, commitment to continuous improvement and displaying good business acumen.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.



SIMON JOHNSON
GODOLPHIN

As in most industries, leadership in thoroughbred racing and breeding is a quality that can't always be bought or taught.

In the case of this year's SSSA finalists Simon Johnson and Michael Shepherdson, it has come from within, to emerge in what seems an endless supply.

Johnson is the Assistant Stud Manager at Woodlands, the Hunter Valley home of Godolphin's broodmare band and is a finalist in the Leadership category for the second time, having been nominated on each occasion by colleague Kylie Mills who describes him as "the person these Awards were created for".

"Simon is a motivator who is constantly leading his team toward excellence, fostering their careers and always encouraging."

Johnson grew up with horses in South Australia and has studied a wide range of industry subjects at TAFE and university.

He sees it as his duty to pass on whatever he can to his staff.

"We have an obligation to give everyone who comes into the industry, and who shows a willingness to learn, the opportunity to advance themselves," Johnson said.

"I get tremendous satisfaction from sharing what I know with the great

people we have at Godolphin and at Woodlands.

"But the greatest thing in the job for me is to work with such an outstanding group whose passion and dedication is unlimited. I can't thank them enough for what they do for me.

"These Awards recognise not so much the people like me, but all of those who give so much to ensure the farm and the industry are successful."

Like Johnson, Mick Shepherdson is also a previous SSSA finalist, having been runner-up in the Dedication to Racing section in 2019. His boss, leading South Australian trainer Tony McEvoy, is again generous in his praise for his Melbourne foreman.

"My Flemington stable has doubled in size in each of the past two years and Michael has made the entire process seamless," McEvoy said.

"Our accomplishments in Victoria are a direct reflection of his dedication."

Shepherdson joined the McEvoy-Mitchell racing team some eight years ago in Adelaide where he quickly rose to the position of foreman, moving to Melbourne with the establishment of the Flemington stable.

For McEvoy, Shepherdson is an essential part of a system that has produced exceptional results.

Typical of all nominees, Shepherdson emphasises that it is the entire staff, not just their leader, who deserves praise and reward.

"The people Tony employs are some of the best in the business and to be able to give them leadership and direction is a privilege," he said.

"Winning awards is definitely not something you set out to do. But when it happens, it's deeply appreciated.

"This is very exciting for my entire family and I can't thank our staff, Godolphin, the TBA and Racing Australia enough."



MICHAEL SHEPHERDSON
MCEVOY-MITCHELL RACING

DEDICATION TO RACING

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An Award to an individual staff member who has shown talent for horsemanship in the racing field, and consistency and reliability in a racing role. Must have at least five years' service in the racing industry and must have been pivotal in his or her employer's success.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.



MICHAEL HURRY
VICTORIA RACING CLUB

Dedication is a powerful theme possessed by every nominee in every category of the Stud & Stable Staff Awards, and in Michael Hurry and Brett "Lofty" Killion it is particularly well-defined.

Both men have been in the industry since they were boys, and both remain as devoted as ever.

Killion began his working association with horseracing in 1996 when he joined the Gai Waterhouse stable at Randwick as a strapper and it continues today as the foreman at Chris Waller's Queensland stable on the Gold Coast.

In between, he has worked for such notable trainers as John Thompson and John O'Shea and he guided Godolphin's G1 Stradbroke Handicap winner Impending through some difficult days in the lead-up to what was a crowning moment in the career of his trainer, Darren Beadman.

For Killion, dedication to his horses has always been his motivation. But the people he has met and learned from over the past 25 years have also made racing a lifelong passion.

"I love it all. The characters, horses and humans, they are what keeps me in the game," Killion said.

"Some of my best friends are people I met at Gai's on my first day working there.

"And the memory of some of the horses I've looked after will always be with me."

Killion stayed with Waterhouse for more than 15 years during which time he worked with a man who he regards as one of his greatest mentors, "Spider" Barker.

"Spider was a long-time foreman with Tommy Smith and stayed on with Gai. He'd seen it all and taught me things and gave me advice that still helps me through every day," he said.

"Ever since then, I've learned from the best. There's been the pure horsemanship of John Thompson, the work ethic of Gai Waterhouse, the sharpness of John O'Shea's mind and Chris Waller's methodical search for perfection."

And he learned well. As his nominator for the SSSA, Reg Fleming, said: "Lofty is honest, hard-working and ever-loyal – and come what may, the horse always comes first with him."

"He was nominated for three categories of the Awards and he deserves every one of them."

Mick Hurry's racing life began as a five-year-old wandering around Flemington racecourse with his father and has continued for more than half a century.

It has encompassed everything from stablehand to trackwork rider to barrier attendant to clerk of scales to his current

role as training track supervisor at Flemington.

And for much of the time he also worked as an aircraft engineer at Ansett.

Hurry was nominated for the Awards by his sister Suzie who has a lifetime knowledge of her brother's "get in, can-do attitude to everything he does".

"Michael's loyalty to the racing industry means a work schedule that doesn't fit a nine-to-five week," she said.

"His devotion to all things racing has meant a lot of disruption to his life."

Along with the various mishaps and accidents that can be a part of working closely with horses, Hurry also endured cancer in 2015 which caused a revision of his duties with the Victoria Racing Club.

In his 40th year with the VRC and his 50th in the business, Hurry remains the supervisor of the Flemington training tracks where he applies his vast knowledge to ensuring the safety of horses, riders and stable staff.

THOROUGHBRED CARE AND WELFARE

An Award to an individual who has demonstrated a commitment to the care and welfare of thoroughbreds who are not actively racing, and/or created a greater awareness, passion and care for the thoroughbred horse in its second/alternate career (breeding, breaking, pre- and post-racing career, re-homing, retraining, providing a comfortable retirement, etc). These may be, for example, a quiet achiever, paid or volunteer in retraining or re-homing of the thoroughbred.

PRIZE: Trophy and \$10,000 to the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.



JADE WILLIS
JW EQUESTRIAN

In an area of the industry that is both sensitive and essential, Jade Willis and Liz Andriske fill a role that can never be supported too strongly.

Willis and Andriske, the finalists in the Thoroughbred Care and Welfare category, give time, money and boundless energy to provide new lives for as many former racehorses as they can.

And in an area that figures prominently in the vision of Godolphin's founder, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, they continue a tradition of selfless devotion in this category of the SSSA.

Willis began her association with racing in New Zealand in the stable of trainer Dave Enright who gave her a horse to retrain, igniting a passion for giving old thoroughbreds new homes.

After pursuing her passion while working for a number of racing and general equestrian operations, Willis formed JW Equestrian, a business aimed at finding alternative, useful, loving homes and occupations for retired racehorses.

As well as retraining off-track thoroughbreds (OTT), and finding them new owners, Willis instructs their riders in various equestrian disciplines and competes herself in eventing.

"I started the business to give horses a chance to be champions off the racecourse," Willis said.

"I always loved thoroughbreds and I decided that if I was going to do this, I would do it properly."

That meant buying a 40-acre property to train and condition the horses she acquires from their previous owners and trainers.

And Willis's ambitions for old racehorses don't stop at re-education.

"I'd love to get into rehabilitation. Anything I'm lucky enough to receive from these Awards will go toward that," she said.

"But whatever happens, I'm so thankful for the people who nominated me and for the effort that has gone into the SSSA from Godolphin, the TBA, Racing Australia and the sponsors."

Willis's compassion isn't confined to horses.

During the devastating bushfires of early 2020 she also organised and co-ordinated three convoys that delivered fodder and equipment to farms across southern Australia.

Liz Andriske started off in the rehoming business more as a rescuer of horses who passed through sales around Victoria.

Most were headed to the knackery, but thanks to Andriske, hundreds of horses have been saved and rehomed.

Operating these days as Spare One Thoroughbreds, she provides an option for owners and trainers to bypass the sales.

"I originally got most of my horses from the sales, but now trainers and owners are sending them straight to me and other rehomingers around the country," Andriske said.

Andriske's reputation has spread throughout Australia and abroad with one of her proudest moments being when the owners of New Zealand galloper Chance To Dance sent their horse across the Tasman for her to rehome when his racing career ended in 2019.

With her husband Paul, Andriske has funded and built a comprehensive complex in western Victoria where she provides a temporary home for her horses until new owners are found.

"Depending on the price of hay, I'll have between 10 and 35 horses on our property," she said.

Andriske was the runner-up in the Thoroughbred Care and Welfare category in 2018.

"It means so much to be recognised by an organisation like Godolphin and to know that all the organisers and sponsors support what everyone in this business is doing."



LIZ ANDRISKE
SPARE ONE
THOROUGHBREDS

NEWCOMER

An Award to an individual who has worked in the industry, in any capacity, for less than three years. The winner will display passion for, pride in, and an excellent contribution to the thoroughbred industry. The winner will stand out from other newcomers and will be identified as a future and significant valuable member of this industry. (This winner will not be eligible for the Thoroughbred Excellence Award).

PRIZE: Trophy, \$5,000 and a trip to Dubai for the winner, with \$3,000 to the employer to share among staff. \$1,000 to the runner-up.



KELLY COLLEDGE
BRENDEN MACKAY

One is praised as an immense natural talent, the other as a young woman of unlimited potential.

Kelly Colledge and Alyssa Pickels are also commended for their dedication, integrity and their thirst for knowledge.

And as finalists in the Newcomer category, they represent the future of Australian thoroughbred racing.

Colledge joined Grafton trainer Brenden Mackay as a stablehand in early 2019 with zero experience with racehorses.

Within a year she graduated from learning the most basic tasks to saving the stable from extinction, and, since then, to managing the entire show.

"I know it sounds dramatic," said Mackay, "but Kelly literally saved my stable and kept my racing dream alive."

"If she hadn't arrived, I wouldn't be training anymore."

No sooner had Mackay taught Colledge the fundamentals of handling a racehorse and working in a racing stable, than he was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

Mackay's illness presented some daunting challenges to the rookie stablehand – and revealed her considerable integrity.

"Kelly came to us with few skills and is now capable of dealing with almost any situation. Her natural talent and skills are amazing," Mackay said.

"In August last year, Kelly was offered a start at Coolmore in Ireland and was all set to go when I was diagnosed. But she put it all on hold and stayed here and kept my business going.

"She is a truly amazing individual who deserves all the credit in the world."

The attitude that has made Colledge an SSSA finalist reflects her approach to most things.

"I wanted to give it a go, so I took the job. Now I love everything about it," she said.

"Being a finalist is a great thrill, an honour. I can't thank the organisers and Godolphin enough."

Alyssa Pickels draws similar praise from one of the industry's most respected and knowledgeable figures, Kitchwin Hills manager Mick Malone.

"We hit the jackpot when Alyssa joined us," Malone said.

"In my 20 years as manager at Kitchwin Hills I've never seen such potential."

Pickels, a finalist in the SSSA's Newcomer category in 2019, is credited with having "gone to a new level" in the 12 months since.

"It's not just me who thinks so, the entire staff rave about her," Malone said.

"From the moment she walked onto the farm I knew our industry was in good shape.

"Alyssa never stops asking questions, which is a great asset that demonstrates her thirst to learn."

Pickels, a product of the Thoroughbred Breeders Australia's Fast Track program, received two nominations for the Awards, with TBA's Cecelia O'Gorman also endorsing her talent and dedication.

"Alyssa is unbelievably kind, well-mannered, dedicated and hard-working," said O'Gorman, herself an SSSA winner in 2019.

"All the qualities she showed when she came to the Fast Track program are the same as those she displays every day in her work."

Pickel's work ethic and desire for knowledge has carried her well beyond her job description as a Stud Hand, and she now plays a front-line role in the management of 140 mares and of other stud staff at Kitchwin Hills.

"I feel very privileged to be doing something I love so much," Pickels said.

"It is thanks to the TBA that I'm doing this job, and it's incredible to now be involved in these Awards that the TBA, Racing Australia and Godolphin have created. I can't thank all the organisers enough."



ALYSSA PICKELS
KITCHWIN HILLS

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID MERRICK, WINNER OF THE AUSTRALIAN THOROUGHBRED EXCELLENCE AWARD 2019

“It was an honour and a privilege to win last year’s Excellence Award and those feelings continue as a member of the judging panel, now having an input into choosing this year’s winners.”



STUD MANAGER AT WIDDEN STUD, DAVID MERRICK, SALUTES THE 2020 SSSA WINNERS

A lifetime on stud farms and more than a quarter of a century at one of Australia’s most famed thoroughbred nurseries have made David Merrick one of the most skilled and respected horsemen in the business.

Merrick has served as Stud Manager at Widden Stud for the past 27 years, during which time he has received some of the industry’s most coveted honours.

The Excellence Award added a unique accolade to a proud career, acknowledging his dedication and talent to a wider audience.

Merrick has added his experience to the panel that judged the 2020 Stud &

Stable Staff Awards, a task he regards as yet another honour.

“So much of what we do is on the farm and away from the outside world, so to have an award that recognises so many aspects of our industry is a fantastic initiative,” Merrick says.

“To shine a light, as these Awards do, on such a fantastic group of people who all do the sort of work that keeps our industry alive is something that rewards us all.

“The organisers, the sponsors and all those who nominated their employees, colleagues and partners for the Awards also deserve a lot of gratitude.

“For me, it was an honour and a privilege to win last year’s Excellence Award and those feelings continue as a member of the judging panel, now having an input into choosing this year’s winners.

“It is a job that is quite daunting and something of a revelation to be reminded that there are so many dedicated and talented people doing so much.

“Congratulations to all the nominees, to all the finalists and to the winners. All of them, and all that they do, deserve to be recognised.”

OUR WINNERS FROM THE PREVIOUS FOUR YEARS

RACING AUSTRALIA AND THOROUGHBRED BREEDERS AUSTRALIA WOULD LIKE TO THANK:



2019 winners (from left): Lindy Thewlis, Steve Adams, Cecelia O'Gorman, David Merrick, David White, Talia Cranfield and Warren Sutton



2018 winners (from left): Meg Stanley, Lee Purchase, Scott Eeles, Joe Agresta, Peter Keating, Patrick Sheehan and Hannah Dick

2017 winners (from left): John Livingstone, Vikki Cannon, Jeremy Rogers, Jane Gollan, Lyn Dressing and Kellie McCarthy

2016 winners (from left): Gerry Ryan, Hayley Nichols, Ian Brady, Jenny Watson, Melanie Caban and Nikki Cook

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai

JUDGING COMMITTEE

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Chairman of Stewards TRSA (SA)

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SearcyMedia and Sky Racing channel (NSW)

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Troy Corstens
Thoroughbred trainer (VIC)

Joe Agresta
2018 Thoroughbred Excellence Award Winner

Peter Heagney
Former Director, Inglis (VIC)

Jenny Watson
SSSA 2016 Thoroughbred Excellence Award Winner (TAS)

Jeremy Rogers
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