

The Advertiser



Overall winner Guide Dogs SA/NT CEO Kate Thiele with Lainie, who is training to be a guide dog. Photo Sam Wundke.

SA Business

Guide Dogs SA chief Kate Thiele named 2015 Telstra SA Business Woman of the Year

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THE guiding hand who has built a better charity and transformed hundreds of lives was named last night as the 2015 Telstra South Australia Business Woman of the Year.

Kate Thiele, chief executive of Guide Dogs SA/NT, has driven extraordinary growth in her organisation.

She brokered a giving program that tripled turnover, grew active donors from 5000 to over 50,000 and regular donors from just 450 a year to an astonishing 21,000.

Her achievements were recognised during a glittering celebration at Adelaide Oval of SA's leading businesswomen — with other individuals winners being a young steelworker, a finance whiz, a legal entrepreneur, an inclusive academic and a retail power player.

Ms Thiele said she was passionate about empowering others.

“Witnessing people living with disability opening up their worlds is truly humbling and I am proud to be part of their journey,” she said.

She joined Guide Dogs SA in 2009 after working for big companies such as Myer and Detmold Packaging.

“I moved to this (non-profit) space because I have a fundamental belief that with amazing people, you can do amazing things,” she said.

“That’s kind of a Kate-ism, that’s me.”

She has overseen Guide Dogs SA becoming the first organisation in Australia to run a program for children with autism, offering families the ability to lead lives that many take for granted.

This complements work with visually and hearing-impaired people.

“We are just as practical as in business, because to raise a puppy, train it, place it in community, teach someone to use the white cane, teach someone how to live successfully with a hearing loss, you need to be practical and have good skills at translating the services to transform lives,” she said.

“You get touched by stories, but the true joy is in seeing how practical intervention changes lives.

“In Australia, every hour every day, someone is told they are going to have significant vision loss and of those, nine will actually be blind.

“By 2050, about 100,000 people in Australia will be totally blind, which will fill Adelaide Oval twice.

“You cannot afford to be caught up in emotions, you have to be focused on outcomes to be achieved by using the limited resources.”

Telstra chief operations officer Kate McKenzie said Ms Thiele and all the South Australian winners were brilliant business women “who are passionate, courageous and not afraid to challenge the established status quo”.



📷 Ashleigh Stiling. Picture Dean Martin.

Ashleigh's style wins top award

FORGING career in the tough steel industry has earned Ashleigh Stiling the title of 2015 South Australian Telstra Young Business Woman of the Year.

Ms Stiling, 27, was recognised last night for her rapid rise through the ranks of Harsco Metals and Minerals, a contractor to the steelworks in Whyalla.

In a town confronted by bleak news about mining and steel manufacture, Ms Stiling's stellar performance defies the negativity.

Starting out as a 20-year-old administration intern via her Bachelor of Business degree at UniSA's Whyalla campus, Ms Stiling became the multinational company's first Australian female operations manager.

Despite working in a male-dominated industry all of her career so far, she has never wanted — nor felt the need — to be one of the boys. She values her femininity too much to try and pretend to be someone she's not.

“I haven't lost any of my female identity at all,” she says.

The intricate, flawless patterns adorning her nails are testament to the fact that she's her own woman. But make no mistake: she's able to stand her ground against seasoned male colleagues whenever the need arises.

“It’s part of my everyday life to walk into a meeting and be the only female, and a lot of the men, at least initially, weren’t used to dealing with a woman half their age. But they are now,” Ms Stiling says proudly.

Her current role sees her manage four male shift leaders, 100 male operators and five female operators — four of whom she has personally employed.

“It is now no longer a shock or rarity to see a female in a heavy mobile vehicle or out on-site,” she says.

“This has promoted Harsco as a culturally diverse organisation, sending a very positive message to our customers and the local community, and gives us a competitive edge.”

Harsco, which operates in 30 countries, works with Arrium and the OneSteel works to improve metal recovery, manage waste materials and handle steel products.

When she was named as the 2014 Whyalla Business Woman of the Year — “That was my proudest achievement to date” — Ms Stiling learnt of the annual SA Telstra Business Women’s Awards. Prior to last night’s event, she said that “winning the Telstra award would mean the absolute world to me”.

“It would be so rewarding and encouraging to be recognised outside of the community,” she said.

“I would use the award to mentor other young women working in regional areas to focus on their career development and help them realise their potential.

“Just because you live in a regional area or because you are a part of a minority group, it doesn’t mean you aren’t able to be successful or make something of yourself. Sometimes it just takes someone to believe in you.”

Full list of SA winners

SA Business Woman of the Year; For Purpose and Social Enterprise Award — Kate Thiele, Guide Dogs SA.

Start-Up — Sarah Bartholomeusz, You Legal.

Entrepreneur — Marissa Schulze, Rise High Financial Solutions.

Government and Academia — Pascale Quester, University of Adelaide.

Corporate and Private — Michaela Webster, Peregrine Corporation.

Young Business Woman — Ashleigh Stiling, Harsco Metals and Minerals, Whyalla.

The Telstra BusinessWomen’s Awards are supported by News Corp Australia.

State winners progress to the national finals on November 18 in Melbourne.