

Bruce awarded OA Medal

THE first inkling that CALM forest worker Gregory Bruce Withnell had that he was in line for Australia Day honours, occurred when he arrived home one evening last September, after a day of tree marking, to find a letter from Douglas Sturkey, Secretary to the Governor-General, informing him that he had been nominated.

From September onwards, Gregory (known to friends and work colleagues as Bruce) and wife Kay waited with subdued excitement for confirmation.

"We were instructed to tell no-one, and tried not to let our hopes build up, particularly Bruce, who played it all very low key," Kay said.

It wasn't until the wee hours of January 17 that Bruce learned that the letter of confirmation had arrived—and he was almost too tired to open the envelope. He had just come from a long, hard day and night of fighting fires at the Myalup pine plantation.

Bruce was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for services to the community, in particular, the State Emergency Services (SES).

"But to this day, the identity of the person who nominated Bruce remains a mystery," said Kay.

Later, another surprise awaited Bruce at Snell's Gardens, where each year the good citizens of Harvey converge for the Australia Day Breakfast. There, the news of Bruce's OAM was announced by compere Nola Merino before most of the guests had time to read about it in their morning newspapers.

"Bruce was totally bowled over," Kay said.

"CALM staff were in on the secret, and because he was on call for fire duty that day they agreed that



Gregory Bruce Withnell OAM. Photo by Andrew Smith, courtesy South West Times

by Verna Costello

between them they would cover for him."

"There have been countless phone calls, and a steady stream of cards and letters from well-wishers await Bruce when he gets home from work each day."

Bruce has been a member of the SES for more than 17 years and its co-ordinator for the past five years.

He is responsible primarily for road rescue, also search and rescue, storm damage, welfare (catering at emergencies such as bush fires) and is highly active in fund raising and promo-

tion. Because of his effective leadership and dedication, he is acknowledged by his peers as the mainstay of the Harvey SES.

Bruce brings this same dedication and enthusiasm to his work with CALM's Harvey Work Centre, where he lives up to his belief that if a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well. He carries this ethic through as his workmates' representative on the Mornington District's Joint Consultative Committee, which is working together to improve the district's productivity through more efficient work practices.

He and Kay have been married for 29 years and

moved to Harvey 28 years ago, where they ran a saddlery and chainsaw store for 11 years, before Bruce joined the then Forests Department in 1979.

Kay joined the SES eight years ago, "because I felt I could make a solid contribution—and I'd see more of Bruce," she said.

"Really, we're an SES family—daughters Tammie, who is about to make us first-time grandparents any day now, and Nola, who works for Bunnings, are also active members."

The medal presentation ceremony at Government Place is expected to take place some time in April or May.

