

Top honour

By Emily Roberts

A former local who was the first female professor of Chemistry in Victoria has been inducted into the Honour Roll of Women.

On International Women's Day this year, Professor Frances Separovic was included on the Victorian Honour Roll of Women in recognition of her role as an inspirational agent of change.

Frances was one of 20 Victorian women to have been honoured for their extraordinary achievements and leadership.

She is Professor of Chemistry and Deputy Director of the Bio21 Institute and former Head of School at the University of Melbourne.

She has also been a Visiting Professor at Harvard Medical School, Honorary Fellow of Birkbeck College UCL and a Senior Member of St Hugh's College, Oxford.

Frances and her family came to Broken Hill when she was three and a half years old.

"My parents thought we were emigrating to America; we would tell everyone we were going to America," she said.

"To my parents it was the same thing."

"We had a first cousin, Ivan Separovich, in Broken Hill who ran a business and that drew us to the Silver City."

After a neighbour enrolled Frances in school, she began to find her love for education.

"School was such a supportive environment, although initially it was a battle to be accepted.

"I felt isolated for a while, but all my teachers were really supportive. I will always fondly remember them.

"They made me feel I could achieve anything."

Having excelled throughout secondary school, completing all advanced courses with high marks, she was awarded both a Commonwealth and teacher's scholarship to further her studies at the University of Sydney.

After completing first term studies she had a desire to explore other interests and went on to work as a junior technical assistant in a microbiology laboratory at CSIRO.

"I dropped out of university within three months. Coming from Broken Hill where everyone knew everyone and you had that support base, Sydney was so different."

"I also spent a lot of my time in high school doing first and second year Maths, and by the time I got to university I found the classes boring."

Following the birth of her son, Frances continued working full time at CSIRO Food Research, studying part time at TAFE, and went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics and physics with Honours in physics at Macquarie

**Frances Separovic**

University, and a PhD in physics at the University of NSW.

After 23 years with CSIRO Food Research in Sydney and a year at the National Institutes of Health in the USA, Frances joined the University of Melbourne in 1996 as an Associate Professor and Reader in Chemistry.

"I really liked working at the University and being able to pass on my knowledge as well as create new knowledge."

Her published work includes studies employing a range of biophysical techniques but her primary research interest is the determination of the structure and dynamics of membrane components in situ using solid-state NMR spectroscopy.

Frances played a key role in the determination of the molecular structure of the antibiotic gramicidin A and the bee toxin melittin within phospholipid membranes.

Using novel solid-state NMR methods she has been able to determine the structure and dynamics of antimicrobial peptides or antibiotics and amyloid peptides from Alzheimer's disease.

Being included in the Victorian Honour Roll was a very significant moment for Frances.

"I felt like a real Aussie; as a migrant kid you always feel different," she said.

"But being included on the Honour Roll made me feel like a real Australian."

"When I went to the awards ceremony, I felt intimidated by all the other women who are so amazing."

"Once we all got talking, I realised that many felt the same way."

"They all did amazing things, but I was just doing my job."

Frances said she felt humbled to be recognised in this way.

Mining safety review

The state's mining watchdog is descending on local mines this week.

Resources Regulator's Deputy Secretary Lee Shearer revealed the high visibility operation would begin today and involve more than 80 safety, environment and compliance inspectors across the state.

"The safety of workers in our mining industry is a priority for the NSW Government, and this compliance blitz will reveal if it is for mine operators too," Ms Shearer said.

"The Resources Regulator will inspect over 100 mines, quarries and petroleum sites across NSW to see if health, safety, rehabilitation requirements and compliance standards are being met, and they'll be speaking with workers about this too."

"The NSW Government and the community expects nothing less than the highest standards of compliance to be demonstrated in the workplace at all times."

In addition to examining general compliance with mining regulations and site safety management systems, the five-day operation will also focus on:

- * Roads and vehicle operating areas at large surface mines and underground metalliferous mines

- * Ground and strata failure in all underground mines

- * Safe operation of mobile plant at quarrying operations

- * Rehabilitation and dam monitoring.

Compliance teams will also continue with scheduled targeted assessments on diesel exhaust emissions, airborne contaminants and fires on mobile plant at relevant sites.

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