

Dahlia Society of Victoria

‘DAHL’ Award Nomination

I, Frances Grylls, as a current DAHL Medallist would like to nominate **Chris Michalopoulos** to all be inducted with the ‘Dahl’ Award.

I will follow the headings as laid out in the DSA form.

Has contributed greatly to dahlias in Australia.

There is probably not an area relating to dahlias in Australia that Chris has not been involved in. Chris received Life Membership of The National Dahlia Society of Victoria (NDSV) the society that is now the Dahlia Society of Victoria (DSV) in 2001 in recognition of his time giving service above and beyond what would be expected in the positions he held until that time to the Victorian Society. He has continued for another 25 years in his service to the DSV and is now the longest serving judge in Victoria, including many years as Head Judge at the State Dahlia Show.

His encyclopaedic knowledge of dahlia forms and methods of cultivation, combined with a wide network of contacts within the horticultural world, has made Chris an ambassador for the dahlia in the wider community and he has been a mentor (and continues to be so) to so many dahlia growers and exhibitors.

Promotes the dahlia.

His passion to spread the love of the dahlia has led Chris to encourage the establishment of dahlia beds in a number of public gardens including: Royal Botanic Garden Melbourne, the grounds of the historic Werribee Mansion, Williamstown Botanic Gardens, Colac Botanic Gardens, Daylesford Wombat Hills Garden and Rippon Lea Estate, which is often visited and is a popular place for wedding photos. Chris has been the gardener and curator at the Rippon Lea dahlia display for 25 years and he was a finalist for the National Trust of Victoria Volunteer of the Year Award in 2025.

As President of the DSV and Vice President of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria (RHSV) Chris initiated the first large display of dahlias and daily dahlia lectures at the then new event known as the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show. This initiative continued for another four years. His reputation as an expert on dahlias has made him a go-to person for interviews, the most recent being on The Horti-Culturalists YouTube channel.

As President of the DSV he would give talks to up to 25 garden clubs across the state in one year; he still gives talks for public at National Trust venue of Rippon Lea Estate.

Contributes to the management of society/societies.

As we have already mentioned Chris has a long history with the DSV. Chris joined the society and Committee in 1990 and was then Vice – President in 1994. He led the Society as President from 1996 to 2002. He was Assistant Show Manager for a year and then Show Manager of the State Show from 1992 to 2002 and has now been Head Judge for many years at that same event. At his request, the late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch opened the State Dahlia Show in 1999.

He has also been remarkably adept at securing raffle prizes and other support from sponsors.

He was an organiser and supporter of the Victorian Country Conferences when they were held in the past.

As a speaker at the 1995 Australian Dahlia Council conference, Chris proposed that a new Australian Dahlia Society be formed, a recommendation that did eventually come to fruition.

Chris co-initiated the Tri-State Challenge held in 1998.

At the initiative of Chris, the Australian Dahlia Society Conference 2000 in Victoria was held in April during the flowering season.

We have listed only his contributions to dahlia societies, he has been involved in many more gardening societies and other groups, including various volunteer roles.

Supports shows.

Looking back in time, Chris was an exhibitor of outstanding blooms. In 1992 he won the Novice Championship at the State Dahlia Show. He never entered the Victorian State or Reserve Championships because of his commitment as President and Show Manager but did win prizes for a Giant and Large Championship and Best Vase in Show. His main championship wins were at affiliate shows, winning in the country at Ballarat Western District Dahlia Society, Kyneton, Kerang, Colac, Seymour, Rochester and Euroa. In Metropolitan Melbourne he had wins at St James, Cheltenham, Broadmeadows, Preston, Northcote, Ringwood, Ivanhoe, Sunshine, Red Hill and Caulfield.

In his time as President, Chris inaugurated the NDSV/DSV Metropolitan and Rural Championships. These championships are rotated each year among the different affiliated country and metropolitan flower shows that have a dahlia section in Victoria. The idea is to support affiliate clubs and to provide a feature which attracts more exhibitors to these smaller shows. During the 27 years Chris was President of Sunshine Golden Age Garden Club, the dahlia section of their Annual Show was always the highlight of the event.

Introduced dahlias of quality.

There are many dahlias that Chris bred and one that is still seen on the show bench today is *Aegean Sky*, a collerette, that has been chosen as 'Flower of the Year' for the 2027 DSV State Dahlia Show. Chris also bred the collerette *Dame Elisabeth Murdoch* for her 100th Birthday. His breeding work wasn't just focused on flowers for the show bench but also on introducing scent to our favourite blooms. *Aegean Sky* being one dahlia which carries a scent.

Encourages new members.

Many new members have found their way to dahlia societies across Australia because of Chris. His wide horticultural connections mean he has been able to take his enthusiasm for the dahlia to a wider gardening audience. Once they reach the DSV he is always ready to answer questions and to offer practical helpful pointers to first-time growers and exhibitors and those that are more experienced too. Each question that he is asked always gets a detailed response with lots of information that can be used.

Mentor to prospective members and new growers.

For Chris, his greatest personal pleasure is the reward of nurturing and guiding upcoming dahlia growers and exhibitors. All classes of exhibitors (Open, Intermediate or Novice) know they can approach Chris when confronted with a problem. Chris can offer advice on the care and treatment of particular cultivars. Chris will even visit the home of a new grower to help them get started with their dahlia patch. For the 2026 Show he provided helpful advice to first time exhibitors in the DSV e-newsletter.

Judging.

Today this is the area where we find Chris giving the most of his time. His expertise in judging dahlias is highly valued.

He qualified as a Registered Judge in 1995 and is the longest serving active dahlia judge in Victoria. He has been Head Judge of the DSV State Dahlia Show for many years. Since 1995, Chris has managed to judge at every Rural and Metropolitan Dahlia Show in Victoria at one time or another. Chris is also recognised as a judge by organisations outside the dahlia world,

Publications.

Chris co-authored with Les Lawson *The Australian Standard for Judging Dahlias*. This was then used in the Judges Manual for the Australian Horticultural Judges Association Inc.

Presentations for meetings, conferences and field days.

We have already touched on this a little. Chris is a motivating speaker who is able to engage an audience without the need for a slide show. He has spoken at dahlia conferences and will always accept an invitation to address an audience of dahlia and garden enthusiasts. In the past, when Victoria had a large number of garden clubs, specialist societies and U3A clubs, Chris would average giving 25 talks a year.

Contributions to newsletters etc.

Chris has authored many articles for magazines here and overseas and has appeared on TV and social media podcasts.

Chris is a regular contributor to the DSV's magazine *Dahlias* and the monthly e-newsletter. The monthly e-newsletter publishes regular advice from Chris on what to be doing in the dahlia patch and a series of 'Tips from the Top' which contain the results of his own research and long experience.

An ambassador for the dahlia.

Chris Michalopoulos is a great ambassador for the dahlia and he is a respected elder of the Dahlia Society of Victoria. He was awarded the Gold John Pascoe Fawcner Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria.

Chris connects with people and uses his background, experience, knowledge of growing dahlias and individual cultivars to share his passion for the dahlia with great success. He shares his joy in the colour and forms of the dahlia and of course the WOW factor that they have to great effect with the public.

His greatest personal pleasure is the reward of nurturing and guiding upcoming dahlia growers and exhibitors.

It is with this extensive list of credits that I, Frances Grylls,
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