

THAI CAVE RESCUE HERO TO SPEAK AT BRISBANE CONFERENCE

Australian diver Dr Craig Challen, one of the heroes at the heart of the recent Thai cave rescue, will speak at next year's Rotary Conference in Brisbane, Qld.



DR CRAIG CHALLEN, a retired Perth veterinary surgeon and Australian technical diver and cave explorer, is regarded as one of the best in the world. It was that reputation that led British diver Rick Stanton to call on Craig's expertise to rescue the Thai football team from the Tham Luang Cave, with his dive buddy and friend, anaesthetist Dr Richard (Harry) Harris.

With around 20 years' diving experience, and a depth record (221 metres) to his credit, Craig and Harry were about to embark on another cave diving adventure on the Nullarbor when the call came to help in the extraordinary rescue mission.

The world held its collective breath while the life and death operation went into coordination mode as the international team examined the best chance of rescue. Then came the rescue mode, and for a few days, people everywhere hoped for a miracle that the boys would be saved.

Not in living memory has there been such a positive news experience as that which revealed the success of the mission, and the extraordinary courage and determination, guided by skill, that the team demonstrated throughout.

Only when all the boys had been rescued did Craig and Harry leave the cave.

Craig was a reluctant hero, but his attempts to avoid the media throng were overcome when the mission was successfully concluded, and all Australians shared an immense sense of pride in one of our own.

"He's an action man, but he's also exceptionally generous," his partner claimed in an interview with *The West Australian*. "He does actually, very quietly, give a lot to not-for-profits; I don't think a lot of people would know that about Craig."

Both Craig and Harry were honoured with the Star of Courage at a ceremony at Parliament House. The award is given for acts of conspicuous courage in circumstances of great peril, and is Australia's second highest bravery decoration. Along with six members of the Australian Federal Police Special Response Unit and a Royal Australian



SEE DR CRAIG CHALLEN SPEAK at the Rotary Brisbane Conference, March 1-3, 2019.
 Register at:
9630conference2019.com.au

Navy clearance diver, they also received the Medal of the Order of Australia at a ceremony at Government House in Canberra, ACT.

“We were lucky enough to be available and have some skills that we could offer that contributed towards

the great outcome,” Craig told WA News on July 15. “There were hundreds of other people there that worked just as hard as us and won’t get any awards. The fact that all the boys are out of the cave and healthy is reward enough.” •



TOP: Dr Craig Challen and his dive buddy and friend, anaesthetist Dr Richard (Harry) Harris, stayed with the boys inside the cave until the last of the boys had been evacuated each day. (Photo: Heather Endall) LEFT: The two doctors were awarded the Star of Courage and the OAM by Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove for their crucial part in the 18-day rescue operation. (Photo: Kym Smith/Newspix)