

Gender imbalance puzzle

Sue Hoban

WHEN it comes to Australia Day honours it seems the more things change the more they stay the same – except on the peninsula.

Australia now has a female Governor-General and Deputy Prime Minister, yet women still made up just 33 per cent of honours recipients on this year's national list.

But the situation was very different on the peninsula, where eight of the 16 local recipients were women. This represented a big improvement on past years when the area actually lagged behind the already low national figure. In 2000, women made up 22 per cent of the local list and 16 per cent in 2005.

This new gender equity has been warmly welcomed by local representatives of women's groups. But they remain perplexed at how the entrenched national imbalance might be redressed.

Jenny Forster, from the Women's Electoral Lobby, said the core issue was that women were simply not being nominated in the same numbers as men. "I don't think it's that women don't know other women who are outstanding or that they are not wanting to nominate them, I think the process is just passing them by



Evelyn Whittaker, local president of professional women's group Zonta.

Picture: BRAD HUNTER PP239316.

and they're not as aware of it," she said.

Ms Forster said this might be because women were less connected to the groups which traditionally threw up a lot of nominees, such as sporting and business networks.

Evelyn Whittaker, local president of business and professional women's service club Zonta, which does actively nominate women for honours, believes it may also be because women are more self-effacing and quieter about their activities and

achievements. "We tend to stand in the background," she said. "I think women prefer to 'do' rather than talk about it."

Ms Whittaker could be a good example – in addition to running her own bookkeeping practice and holding executive positions in

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Zonta for many years, she has also notched up 11 years as a rural fire service volunteer, but prefers to keep this in the background.

"I get a buzz out of doing what I do, I don't need to put my head up," she said.

Both women believe the community needs to be more aware of the whole honours process and become more proactive about nominating worthy female candidates.