

By **STAFF REPORTER**

A SENIOR nurse who trudged five miles through deep snow to get to work to ensure elderly residents were taken care of even though she wasn't officially on duty is in line for a top award.

Colleagues say Rhian Evans, the Registered General Nurse (RGN) at the Plasgwyn Nursing Home in Criccieth, Gwynedd, is one in a million

According to her managers at the home where she has worked for almost 14 years, the snow trek is typical of the way 53-year-old Rhian goes the extra mile to see service users are well cared for and comfortable, and is one of the reasons why she has landed a place in the final of major national competition, the 2013 Wales Care Awards.

Her colleague Irene Miller, 58, has also been shortlisted. She has been nominated in the category for Residential Care Practitioner, which is sponsored by the Older People's Commissioner.

This is the 11th anniversary of the awards and the glittering presentation ceremony will be held at City Hall in Cardiff on Friday, October 18.

The awards are in association with Care Forum Wales, a not-for-profit organisation set up in 1993 to give independent care providers a single professional voice with which to speak on one of the most important issues of our time – how to provide better quality care for those who need it most.

Rhian, who has been shortlisted in the Nurse of the Year category of the awards sponsored by Tena Products, was born and raised in Penrhyndeudraeth, where she still lives with her family.

She has been married to husband Tony for the past 30 years and the couple of three children, sons Dylan, 27, and Gethin, 24, and a 21-year-old daughter, Sara.

Rhian attended primary school in Penrhyndeudraeth and secondary school at Ysgol Ardudwy in Harlech.

She then trained for three years to become a nurse at the old Caernarfon and Anglesey Hospital in Bangor and obtained her State Registered Nurse qualification in 1981.

Rhian initially worked as a nurse at the hospital in which she had completed her training before moving to work in a series of private nursing homes in the area around where she lives.

When the last home she was at closed, she began work at Plasgwyn in Penrhyndeudraeth, Criccieth, which cares for 37 elderly residents, and is proud of the fact that she was part of the staff team which was there on its opening day.

Her managers at the home say that Rhian goes out of her way to ensure people who live at Plasgwyn have the best of care and are always treated with dignity and respect.

She is also famous for her willingness to put in extra hours whenever it is required.

The perfect illustration of Rhian's selfless attitude came one freezing morning two winters ago when deep snow blanketed the area and prevented local buses from running.

Even though she was not supposed to be on duty until later in the day she set out for Plasgwyn and when she discovered she couldn't get a bus to work decided to set out on foot.

She recalled: "There had been a pretty heavy snowfall and, what was worse, there was also a lot of ice under foot.

"I packed some overnight things in a bag as I thought I might have trouble getting back home again and tried to get a bus.

"When I found out the buses from Blaenau Ffestiniog weren't running I thought I'd better walk to the home.

"It took me a couple of hours and at times the going was a bit difficult because of the ice but I got there in the end.

"I like walking in my spare time and often do the six miles to Porthmadog and back but that's in the summer when you can stop for an ice cream on the way!

"When I reached Plasgwyn, it was too

bad to get back home so I stayed overnight at one of the Director's home. "My thought before I set out through the snow was that I had to get to the home to look after the residents in case nobody else had been able to get in.

"I like to think that if my own parents were in a home someone would do the same for them."

Rhian added: "I really enjoy my job and working with elderly people. I can't give any reason why that it is. I suppose it's just something you have in you.

"I've been in nursing for over 30 years and I just love it as a profession. I can't think of ever doing anything else."

Nominating Rhian for the Wales Care Award, Ceri Roberts, managing director of Cariad Homes which runs Plasgwyn Nursing Home, said of her: "She always puts the needs of the service users and care practitioners before her own and very rarely has a break when she is on duty.

"Rhian is very conscientious and reliable, regardless of how many hours she is contracted to work will always ensure all her tasks are completed prior to leaving work, and is always willing to help out on her days off.

Rhian said she never expected to be either nominated or shortlisted for the Nurse of the Year Award, explaining: "I just like to get on with the job and make sure the residents are well looked after but I'm proud to be put forward for myself and for Plasgwyn.

"I'll be going along to the awards evening at Cardiff City Hall with my husband Tony and we're looking forward to it very much."

As a child growing up in Liverpool Irene had a yearning to be a nurse but never had the opportunity. About 20 years she and her husband took over the Sun Inn in Llangollen before moving to Prenteg, near Porthmadog, to run the clubhouse at Aberdunant Caravan Park.

"When he retired I started looking for a part-time job and that is when we saw the card in the window," she said.

Irene began work as a care practitioner at the home in 2004 and was apprehensive about the change of role, but soon took it, proving to be a kind and considerate carer.

She was nominated for the award by manager Susan Fryatt who praised not only the way she went about her work with diligence, compassion and kindness, but also for the way she took new recruits under her wing as a mentor.

"You can always tell when Irene is on duty as all the little things which are important for each service user are done," said Susan.

Further tributes came from colleagues, including Rhian Evans who said she could always be confident in delegating more complex duties to Irene in the knowledge she would always give 100%.

Irene said she derived great satisfaction from working with the elderly residents and chatting to them about their past.

"I love the job and the people, and they deserve the best," she said.

Mario Kreft MBE, the Chair of Care Forum Wales, said the Wales Care Awards had gone from strength to strength.

He said: "The event is now firmly established as one of the highlights in the Welsh social care calendar.

"The aim is to recognise the unstinting and often remarkable dedication of our unsung heroes and heroines across Wales.

"The care sector is full of wonderful people because it's not just a job it's a vocation – these are the people who really do have the X Factor.

"If you don't recognise the people who do the caring you will never provide the standards that people need and never recognise the value of the people who need the care in society.

"We need to do all we can to raise the profile of the care sector workforce - they deserve to be lauded and applauded.

"It is a pleasure to honour the contribution of all the finalists. Each and every one of them should be very proud of their achievement."

# She walked 5 miles in deep snow to get to elderly clients

## SENIOR NURSE RHIAN UP FOR TOP AWARD



**ONE IN A MILLION:** Rhian Evans and Irene Miller at Cariad Care Home with resident Lillian Martin.



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