

Shenhua digs deep

BY STUART TURNER

A \$1 MILLION donation towards the Gunnedah Rural Medical Centre is the latest step in transforming the community's health services.

The gift from mining company Shenhua Watermark, means construction on the multi-million dollar, state-of-the-art centre will start next year.

The donation also means the centre, which aims to ensure the town has sufficient doctors and other leading health professionals, will also start off debt-free.

Barwon Division of Practice chair and senior Gunnedah GP Dr Grahame Deane said the donation, confirmed at a special ceremony yesterday, was another step in "bringing health back closer" to Gunnedah residents.

"At the moment this is just a building - but we have much bigger plans than that," Dr Deane said.

"We want to start developing clinical outreach health centres in areas like Mullaley, Carroll and Premer.

"This is your project - and with the help of people like Shenhua, it is going to happen."

Dozens of the project's supporters, community leaders and residents attended the presentation



A DAY of celebration at yesterday's Shenhua Watermark cheque presentation. Standing, from left, Kate Perrett, Philippa Murray, Council General Manager Robert Campbell, Michael Baxter, Harvey Stoneman and Dr Grahame Deane. In front, Penny Crawford, Fiona Strang and Kate Gilbert.

which will help ensure the centre is up and running by 2011.

Specialists from various health fields will use the centre as a base, which will act as a 'one-stop shop' for Gunnedah's health needs.

To be built in the grounds of Gunnedah District Hospital, the

centre - which was confirmed after a \$4.3 million donation by the Federal Government earlier this year - will also serve as a training base for students.

Dr Deane said a 20-year lease had been secured for the community-owned centre, which will

ensure residents have "appropriate access to integrated health practitioners."

The Gunnedah Shire Band Hall presentation, also attended by senior Shenhua Watermark staff, including Project Director Joe Clayton, was another moment to

savour for the scheme's dedicated team of supporters.

The Gunnedah Rural Health Limited (GRHL) committee has campaigned for the centre for several years, helping with fundraising activities that have generated thousands of dollars.

GRHL chair Penny Crawford, said every donation had been critical to ensuring plans for the centre came to fruition.

"This donation means the centre will be up and running sooner rather than later," Mrs Crawford said.

"It is really exciting and we thank Shenhua for this wonderful show of support."

Joe Clayton said the donation underlined the company's role as a member of the Gunnedah community.

He denied that the donation was merely a public relations exercise, which has attracted criticism from pro-agricultural and anti-mining groups over the company's exploration work in the Liverpool Plains area.

"Shenhua is part of the community," he said.

"Many of our staff live in this community and we want to see it progress.

"This is a benchmark project for medical health facilities in NSW and we are really looking forward to seeing it develop."