

**Company:** Fernwood Fitness, Melbourne, Victoria

**Company Description:** Fernwood Fitness is an award-winning premium, women-only gym with an unmatched level of service and product offering. We have over 74 clubs across the country with over 92,000 member. We focus on strong women, real results, and fitness services tailored to our members goals. A membership offers access to a supportive community, exclusive benefits, and a commitment to empowering women.

**Nomination Category:** Individual Awards Categories

**Nomination Sub Category:** Woman of the Year - Franchising

**Nomination Title:** Di Williams



1. Which will you submit for your nomination in this category, a video of up to five (5) minutes, explaining the achievements since July 1, 2023 of the nominated woman, OR written answers to the questions? (Choose one):

Written answers to the questions

2. If you are submitting a video of up to five (5) minutes in length, provide the URL of the video here, OR attach it to your entry via the "Add Attachments, Videos, or Links to This Entry" link above, through which you may also upload a copy of your video. If you are submitting written answers to the questions for this category, provide them in the spaces below:

3. Briefly describe the nominated individual: history and past performance (up to 200 words):

**Total 200 words used.**

Di Williams' journey began with a barbell and a bold vision. In the 1980s, strength training facilities were male-dominated spaces, often unwelcoming to women. Di, saw an opportunity to redefine the fitness experience for women. She envisioned a space that combined the intensity of strength training with comfort, care, and community.

In 1989, she brought this vision to life, opening the first Fernwood Fitness club in a repurposed classroom in the backstreets of Bendigo, a regional town in Victoria, Australia. At a time when aerobics was the norm and strength training was stigmatised, Di challenged outdated narratives and empowered women to embrace physical strength.

Despite scepticism, her concept resonated creating not just a gym, but a sanctuary where women could feel safe, supported, and strong. Di's commitment attracted like-minded women and laid the foundation for a national movement.

Today, Fernwood Fitness is a thriving franchise network with over 74 clubs and more than 90,000 members across Australia. Di has not only built a business and brand but cultivated a new generation of female entrepreneurs. She has ignited a movement - one that has redefined what it means for women to feel strong, confident, and supported in their fitness journeys.

4. Outline the nominee's achievements since July 1 2023 that you wish to bring to the judges' attention (up to 250 words):

**Total 224 words used.**

Di Williams has continued to demonstrate visionary leadership steering the brand through a transformative few years of expansion, innovation, and growth.

Fernwood celebrated its 35th anniversary in December 2024, a milestone marked by rapid expansion and transformation. Since July, 2023 four new clubs were opened and one relocated to be Australia's largest Fernwood, bringing the national footprint to 74 clubs across Australia.

[REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]

Innovation remains central to Di's leadership.

- o She spearheaded the rollout of Masterclass, a training platform that provides flexible, in-house professional development. [REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]
- o Relaunching Fernwood's signature FIIT30 small group training program, developed in partnership with the HIIT Factory to suit time-poor women. [REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]
- o Launched a new partnership with AstonRX introducing a complimentary metabolic reset program for new members, [REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]. The programme has transformed several of Fernwood members lives
- o Reinvigorated the Fernwood Foundation, supporting charities that empower disadvantaged women, deepening Fernwood's social impact raising over \$196,699.

5. Reference any attachments of supporting materials throughout this nomination and how they provide evidence of the claims you have made in this nomination (up to 250 words):

**Total 226 words used.**

**AstonRX x Fernwood Testimonial** Please refer to URL link titled AstonRX x Fernwood Testimonial. This testimonial is from Rania a Fernwood member and outlines the profound impact of a program such as AstonRX has on women's lives.

After her fifth baby, Rania Alfredson joined the AstonRX program to shed a final 5kg and reboot her eating habits. What she gained was far more—better gut health, renewed energy, and a healthier relationship with food. Balancing motherhood and the program were tough, but with planning and meal prep, she stayed on track. She discovered possible intolerances, adjusted, and watched her weight drop from 65.2kg to 55.5kg. The program's structure, tools, and rapid results boosted her confidence. Rania calls her transformation “outstanding” and credits AstonRX and Fernwood for changing her life. She now lives stronger, healthier, and empowered. Refer to the attached images of Rania

**Fernwood Foundation Charity Partner Testimonials**

Refer to attachments - Community Engagement - Melissa Robinson and Community Engagement - RizeUp Testimonial.

Through the Fernwood Foundation, Fernwood partners with like-minded charities to uplift and empower disadvantaged women across Australia. Attached is a testimonial from the CEO of charity partner RizeUp, highlighting the meaningful impact Fernwood and its nationwide community have made. A second testimonial from franchisee Melissa Robinson underscores the power of uniting charitable partnerships with local franchise networks to create lasting, community-driven change.

6. Explain why the achievements you have highlighted are unique or significant. If possible compare the achievements to the performance of other players in your industry and/or to the nominee's past performance (up to 250 words):

**Total 250 words used.**

Di Williams achievements over the past year stand out across the broader Australian fitness and franchising industries.

The Fernwood brand and business model has grown despite many other fitness brands entering the market. While many fitness brands struggled to rebuild member numbers post-pandemic, Fernwood experienced a 20% increase in total membership.

Expanding to 74 clubs nationwide, Fernwood continues to grow, providing women with a safe space and community to be themselves. Di is committed to delivering the Fernwood mission of empowering women, whether this be employees or members. This is highlighted through the many awards Fernwood has achieved in 2024, Fernwood was awarded over seven awards at the fitness industry's prestigious AusActive awards night, including Brand of the Year as well as Canstar's Best Rated Gym of the Year, the latter of which is voted for by the public.

The launch of Masterclass, with over 1,302 staff onboarded, is a standout initiative in training. Helping to deliver consistent service delivery and operational excellence.

Rather than focusing on memberships Di ensures her members are also getting value through strategic partnerships. Traditional fitness models have long prioritised weight loss over strength and generalised approaches over female-specific needs. Fernwood's partnership with AstonRX challenges this standard, shifting the focus from “skinny” to “strong and healthy,” empowering women to embrace strength, nourishment, and long-term wellness, transforming women's lives.

The relaunch of the Fernwood Foundation raising \$196,699 for disadvantaged women further sets Fernwood apart, proving Di's commitment to social impact alongside commercial success.

## Attachments/Videos/Links:

[Di Williams](#)



[REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]