



**The rib bone's connected to the jaw bone:** Part of Heather Millington's rib was used to build up her worn down jawbone and then dental implants were inserted in an Australian-first.

# Aussie first: Heather's rib used to create jaw

By Ilsa Cunningham

When Lapstone resident Heather Millington sought advice regarding her worn down jawbone, the last tool she expected her surgeon to use was her own rib.

She went into hospital for eight days last year to have a rib removed, and then it was inserted into her jaw. Her jawbone had worn down from decades of denture wearing, and was at risk of fracture.

Mrs Millington was experiencing a significant amount of nerve pain prior to the surgery.

"An x-ray showed I hardly had any [jaw] bone left. It was like a thin piece of chicken bone," she said.

The surgery was completed by Mountains resident Dr John McHugh, a cosmetic and oral maxillofacial surgeon from The Cosmetic and Maxillofacial Clinic in Penrith.

He said Mrs Millington's surgery was an Australian first.

"I removed a section of her rib, and grafted it onto her jaw for stability to place dental implants,

recreating the function and appearance of her jawbone," Dr McHugh said.

"I then designed a patient-specific surgical tool on computer software, and sent the design to prosthetic technicians in Sweden.

"The tool was then produced in Sweden, and used during surgery to accurately place dental implants into the rib graft."

Two other Mountains resident were also involved in the procedure.

Blaxland prosthetist Dell Christie was involved in the prosthetic preparation, and the permanent teeth were secured using the Davis Bridge, designed by long-time Blaxland resident prosthetist Grant Davis.

"It came about from my frustration that plastic bridges typically used in this situation regularly fail.

I wanted to create a permanent solution," Mr Davis said.

Mrs Millington said it has been a long, slow process of recovery but now she is finding chewing her food a little easier.

"I feel good now. I'm active now, do the housework and keep up."