

BUSH FIRE ACTIVITIES REPORT

In probably the largest and most demanding project ever undertaken by this Club, the Rotary Club of Alexandra became involved in BLACK SATURDAY in many ways. The Bush fire co-ordinating Committee sees this lengthy report as the Club's historical report on this important period.

RELIEF CENTRE:

Tom Farrell was at the Secondary College on Saturday evening 7th March and realised these hordes of survivors from Marysville, Narbethong and Buxton, needed to be fed. Being a resourceful Rotarian, Tom found a kitchen key, rang the food suppliers [who donated food for several days], found some volunteers and thus commenced a two-week saga, where Tom, with a team of Rotarians and community volunteers, provided an average of 1400 meals a day for those two weeks. As needs arose Tom and crew met them; meals went to Police and Army at Marysville, to Narbethong, CFA coming off shift and to volunteers at the distribution centres. Rotary & Lions alternated with Breakfast every morning. Tom was very indebted to Holmesglen TAFE [Tim Nichol] who provided many of those thousands of meals and also to the Red Cross which gave him accreditation as their representative in Alexandra and access to funds. This accreditation and funds access became increasingly shaky, as a stream of Red Cross people appeared and went, all with apparently different objectives and views. Three months later that all seems to be settled, thanks partly to the help of Fran Bailey. Great work, Tom, Brian Dillon, David & Gaye Strongman, John Bassett, John Cannon, Ross Thompson, John Sainsbury, Doug Hines, Maurie Pawsey, those who helped with the BBQ` every second morning and volunteers.



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DISTRIBUTION CENTRE:

On Sunday 8th, Rotarian Kent Radford was asked by the Shire to organise the receipt and distribution of donated goods. This commenced in the Alexandra Self Storage Units with Rotarians and community volunteers, but by Tuesday after a meeting with the Shire, this became a joint Rotary/ Shire Project, with Kent as Supremo. The location moved to Gaudion's Cherry Packing Shed as the Receiving Depot, with Distribution from St John's Anglican Church Hall for Clothes and the RSL Hall for Toys, Bedding etc. After about ten days, the Shire decided to consolidate everything in the Packing Shed and, after a mammoth packing operation, this was achieved. This was a massive operation, where semi trailers were queued up for day after day, delivering a multitude of goods of all types; and the fire survivors were able to browse for their needs. One major difficulty was the river of second-hand clothes, which eventually had to be politely stopped. After a few days, storage of goods extended into adjacent warehouses, and shipping containers supplied by Lindsay Fox.

Rotarians, their partners, and over two hundred community volunteers staffed the operation.



An immense helping hand came from business houses in Melbourne, an example being Australian Unity, who sent up a number of busloads of volunteer employees, who worked willingly and efficiently. A conservative estimate was that over eight thousand hours had been given by the volunteers and after distribution of goods to survivors, when the operation was wound up by the Shire and DHS, seven 40-foot shipping containers of goods were sent to a DHS distribution centre in Clayton. After two months a thank you barbecue was held on 3rd April. Rotarians heavily involved included: Kent Radford, Nora Dunn, Kelly Bedford, Peter Savage, Jeff Gilbert, Bob Tate, Rob Chaffe, John Sainsbury, Mick Hall, Chris Jackson, John Bassett, Jim Kinniburgh,

David Kneeshaw, Rod Sloan, Doug Hines, Lindsay Baker, Richard Lovett, John Monteath, Terry Finlayson, Alan Welch, Bob Flowers, Jim Tregaskis, and in the initial stages – Brian Dillon, David Strongman, John Cannon, Maurie Pawsey, Denis Payne, John Sharwood, Ross Thompson.

The SANDRINGHAM SHED PROJECT:

Several Sandringham Rotarians delivered a load of donated goods in the first few days and this developed into a Project from the Sandringham-based Bayside Building Group, with support from the Rotary Club of Sandringham, to fabricate, deliver and erect twenty rural Sheds – each of 6 metres by 10 Metres, with electrical wiring. The project was valued at a massive \$ 300,000. Rotary Club of Alexandra's role was to identify the sites [either sheds or house



or both had to have been burnt and the owners to be long term residents], obtain building permits, set out the sites, have the foundations excavated, provide guides and house and feed the eighty workers for three days, when they arrived on 27th March.. The Sheds arrived on trucks over the previous week and on 27th March.

The 27th March at 7.30 am was an enthralling sight, with eighty workers and their utilities and trailers, two trucks, Rotarians & owner guides, Gary McMillan and his team with the workers' lunches, all lined up on the highway at Narbethong.

The Sheds went up in the next three days. The workers were accommodated at the Eildon Holiday Resort. Gary & Kym McMillan, Janette Lovett and their team cooked breakfasts and cut lunches, and provided BBQs at Rotary Park on Saturday night and Sunday as a farewell.

This was a magnificent project, culminating in a Sandringham Rotary Club Meeting in Brighton Beach, attended by ten Rotarians and partners from Alexandra and the Bayside Building Group suppliers & workers, who were presented with Certificates of Appreciation by Rotary Club of Alexandra, one hundred and twenty in all.

Mention needs to be made of Brian Dillon [building approval applications, setting out sheds, assisted by Doug Hines, John Cannon, John Sainsbury, Denis Payne], Richard Lovett's team of David Kneeshaw, Lindsay Baker, cleaned out the foundation holes - three hundred of them of them, and Greg Rennie, who carried out the excavations. Maurie Pawsey and John Cannon obtained the sites and carried out the overall co-ordination and Maurie Pawsey was the liaison contact with Mark Sutherland of Sandringham. Guides included John Sainsbury, Denis Payne, John Sharwood, Brian Stevenson, Doug Hines.

This Project involved significant expenses for Alexandra, including excavations, accommodation, food and refreshments, timber and bracing. District 9790 came to the rescue with a grant of \$15,000.

VOUCHERS:

In the first week of Relief activities, the Shire asked Rotary to provide fifty pairs of boots for Narbethong. These were purchased at local stores and eventually paid for by the Rotary Club of Balwyn [\$3700]. From this Maurie Pawsey and John Cannon developed the Voucher scheme, initially for workboots at \$100 each person. \$4000 worth of vouchers were issued to survivors and redeemable only at local suppliers.

Further issues of vouchers were made as funds became available [via contacts by John Sharwood, Brian Stevenson and Maurie Pawsey with Melbourne Clubs & later District 9790 Clubs]. These issues were for \$50 vouchers – to a maximum of \$250 per family - for tools, small household appliances, cleaning materials and implements, work clothes – not for food or liquor.

Major contributors were Rotary Club of Balwyn, \$23700, Rotary Club of Oakleigh \$10, 000, Bendigo Bank, East Malvern Branch, \$5000, Rotary Club of Mooroopna, \$6000, and the Rotary Club of Nunawading \$2,500

Total Benefit in Vouchers made available to survivors and local traders was \$70,000, at time of reporting.

EASTER ART SHOW & BALWYN ROTARY CLUB:

Following concern that the Art Show might not attract sponsors because of the impact of the fires, Bob Flowers and Maurie Pawsey contacted the Rotary Club of Balwyn. They provided sponsorship of \$10,000 [\$9000 from Balwyn & \$1000 from North Balwyn] This gave a major boost to the Show [Director Jeff Gilbert], which attracted four hundred entries in a depressed economic situation, amplified by the fires. Trevor & Carole Perry represented the Rotary Club of Balwyn at the Official Opening.

OTHER PROJECTS:

- SEWING MACHINES Via the Rotary Club of Carlton, the club became the custodian of nineteen sewing machines and overlockers. These were allocated through Alexandra Community Health [Debbie Skinner-Louis]

- BOUNDARY FENCING A team arranged by John Birtchnell [including Alan Parsons & John Conway] assisted by Rotarians installed 1km of boundary fencing for the Perry brothers and co-ordinated a large donation of pre-used pine posts from the Rotary Club of Mooroopna.

- MARYSVILLE TEMPORARY HOUSING VILLAGE

- Planting and clean up for the Official Opening:

Rotary Club of Forest Hills provided the plants [over \$600]. Rotary Club of Alexandra organised the day, with its own members, plus Rotarians from Eltham, Diamond Creek, Healesville, Heidelberg and others [60 in all]

- Fencing Playgrounds:

This request from Kim Wilkie for the Marysville Housing Village was costed by John Cannon and referred to Rotary Club of

Doncaster, who, coupled with Rotary Club of Adelaide [at their request] agreed to meet the cost of \$9175; to be installed about 15th June..

- An offer of the timber [trusses etc] plus bracing and brackets, from the Bayside Building Group was eventually accepted by the Marysville Housing Village and is likely to be used by ESA in building a Storage Shed. We paid the transport costs.

- Requests for safe flooring under swings / new floor coverings are being costed and may be referred to District for funding.

MARYSVILLE MOTOR MUSEUM:

Recognising that Marysville desperately and urgently needed covered space for a business centre and that communication between the Shire and community needed improvement and after consultations with the Marysville and Triangle Development Group [MATDG], the club made a submission to the Shire to approach the State Government to purchase the building. The club also undertook to seek funds from Rotary. This followed a visit and support from DGN Alan Anderson, also Chair of District 9790 Bush Fire Recovery Committee, who authorised the Club to submit the Proposal to the Shire. This submission proposed sharing the potential purchase price [one quarter Rotary , one quarter Shire, one half State Government], the property to be managed by a Section 86 Committee of Shire.

At time of preparation this project was delayed by Shire deferring for further investigation and Rotary central bureaucracy [seeking detailed Submissions].

There remains the possibility of a Community Trust, with Rotary Funds and other funding , purchasing the building for the Community Trust.

We seem to be the only party other than MATDG worrying about the future of Marysville.

- R.C.OF RIDDELLS CREEK DONATION:

This donation was requested to help a Sporting or Youth Club and was donated to the Alexandra Football & Netball Club. The Club had twelve members who had lost all of their equipment in destroyed homes.

- BERRY STREET- WEEKLY MEAL FOR SURVIVORS:

This proposal involved Berry Street seeking funding for a weekly nutritious meal to survivors, justification being their inadequate cooking facilities, low morale and need to demonstrate support. Berry Street is to trial the project of one month and then seek District support through us.

From the BUSH FIRE RELIEF CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE:

Brian Dillon, John Cannon, David Strongman, Gary McMillan, Maurie Pawsey
Treasurer of Bush Fire Appeal - Brian Stevenson.