



HUFF STUFF

Newsletter

Issue 42

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Greetings everyone.

It's been a long time between newsletters. However, the bushfires kept us connected via the regular updates from the Fire Control Centre and then BANC took over providing resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first few months of the shutdown would have been very isolating for many, especially those living alone. Coming on top of the stress of the fires we can safely say it has been a harrowing few months. I hope that you were able to check in every now and then with your neighbours to make sure they were okay. Even now, as our communities begin to open up many people will prefer to continue in relative isolation rather than risk catching the virus. So please continue to be aware of those around you who may need a welfare check.

The RFS brigades have had a very quiet time lately but planning is still going on behind the scenes to prepare for the upcoming fire season. On Monday, a large team of RFS and F&RNSW from Blue Mountains and Lithgow met in Kenny Street, Mount Victoria.

The RFS are prioritising the hazard reduction (HR) along the escarpment from Kanimbla Valley Road to Beaufort Street in this area. This burn has been on the books for years. Planning and preparation will happen this year and the HR is planned for around March 2021 if conditions are right. Because of the risky terrain, protection to properties will need to be thoroughly strategised. Naturally the residents will be given an opportunity to meet and discuss the plans when the time is appropriate.

The local brigades are very appreciative of all of the wonderful donations of money and the endless supply of useful snacks, drinks, wipes, sanitisers (even before COVID-19), eye drops and many other useful items. We also loved the cards made by children and the hundreds of 'thanks' from so many residents. However, you may be wondering what is happening with that \$90m fund that has undergone so much scrutiny to try and get it spread more widely. So I have included a media release from the new Commissioner Rob Rogers which you can read on page two.



The local brigade has been continuing to train small groups of new members to get them ready for the upcoming fire season. Here they are learning about protecting a large gas tank such as the one shown here at Blackheath Public School.

Ninety million dollars of donations supporting volunteers and communities

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Last fire season was unprecedented and so was the response from the community.

Thanks to the support of the community across NSW, Australia and the world, the NSW Rural Fire Service, predominantly through the NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Trust, received a significant amount of public donations – a show of support for the volunteers who gave up their time to help others. We thank everyone for your support and want to provide you with an update on how your donations are being put to good use.

The Trust has been working to identify worthwhile projects that will benefit volunteers and the community, in consultation with members and the NSW RFS. The Trust has already made \$20m of funds available to volunteer brigades across NSW to help them with equipment, training and resources that help them deliver services in their local community.

And now, the Trust has allocated an additional \$70m of funds to support important initiatives that will help volunteer brigades respond to incidents safely, and provide welfare and support to our members. The additional funds have been allocated for programs including modernising the way we respond fire trucks to incidents – from how our volunteers can register their availability, to responding and getting back to their station. The funds will also support new or improved Personal Protective Equipment like helmets and respiratory protection for volunteers – to ensure our members can work safely and get home to their families.

There is also funding to support the health and wellbeing of our volunteers, and to establish an ongoing welfare program to ensure when the worst happens to our volunteers their families are supported into the future.

NSW RFS and Brigades Donations Trust chair Andrew Macdonald said the community can be confident the donations are being put to good use. “NSW RFS volunteers went above and beyond across the season, and so did the community. “These donations will be put to good use to ensure our volunteers can do their roles safely and effectively, and some of these programs will revolutionise the way our brigades deliver their services to the community.” NSW RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers said through the ongoing work of the Trust, which has responsibility for the management of the funds, the community will benefit. “By supporting our brigades, we’re supporting the community by delivering a high standard of fire and emergency service every day.

“Importantly, the donated funds do not replace normal sources of funding such as Government but they do accelerate the delivery of major projects to support volunteers and communities which may otherwise never happen. “We’re also making sure, wherever possible, we’re spending funds in local communities to support the businesses and industries that employ and support our members”.

Blackheath Rhododendron Gardens

The Rhododendron Gardens were devastated by the fires and thousands of established trees were lost. Every Monday an amazing team of volunteers arrive at the gardens at 9.00am to keep them trimmed for the flowering season. However, since the fires it has been and continues to be a mammoth task of removing dead and damaged plantings, chipping the remnants and replanting. I'm sure they would appreciate your help. Its only \$11 to become a member which covers you for insurance. This iconic garden is a real asset to Blackheath and a beautiful place to stroll through. You can even take your dog and kids love it! They can search for the Rhodosaurus hiding in the bush and try to find the five dinosaur nests.



Some rhododendrons are recovering but it will take many years.



Tree ferns are flourishing near the swamp and new rhodos are being planted along the pathways.



One nest down and four to go!