

practitioners and hospital staff who have stood tall during this tragedy.

I turn now to acknowledge the extraordinary fundraising efforts of ordinary people in our communities. We have all heard many stories of the astonishing efforts being made by individuals and groups to raise the much-needed funds to support our bushfire victims. One that was brought to my attention was a fundraising effort by three local businesses in Mooroolbark. Sweet Welcome, Inspire Gifts and Balloonaholics sit side by side on Brice Avenue, Mooroolbark and decided to fundraise for the bushfire appeal. Their joint effort raised \$3111.30, a terrific result: well done to Sweet Welcome, Inspire Gifts and Balloonaholics.

Two children who attend Billanook College in my electorate lost their parents in the fires. They have a younger sibling who attended Marysville Primary School. Both parents perished. Billanook College also lost a former staff member in the tragedy. Within a week the Billanook community put together a fundraising event that I attended last Thursday night. The event raised in excess of \$40 000, and altogether the Billanook community has raised over \$100 000.

15:55 That is truly amazing. These are local mums and dads helping out, and I am informed that earlier this week they filled an army truck with donated goods that were delivered to the Kinglake preschool. This is one of many examples of people opening up their hearts and giving generously to assist those in need. The way families have responded has been brilliant. They have stood tall in this time of adversity.

My parish of St Peter Julian Eymard and that of St Richard's Church undertook an impromptu collection at the church services held over the weekend following Black Saturday. This unannounced collection for the bushfire appeal raised \$15 000 at each of the schools, while the St Peter Julian Eymard and St Richard's parishes raised a further \$2500 each. A total of \$20 000 from local Catholic parishes in Mooroolbark and Kilsyth was truly astonishing.

At Japara Neighbourhood House they are collecting items for pets, to hand to the Coldstream animal shelter. There has been so much goodwill and assistance in so many practical ways, from so many sources. There are lots of good news stories despite the overall tragedy. Helen Keller once said, 'Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it'.

Finally, I would like to personally thank Glenn Patterson, chief executive officer of the Shire of Yarra

Ranges, and staff in the MECC (municipal emergency coordination centre), in relief centres and on the ground. Glenn and his team, together with the many agencies involved in the emergency management response, have done an outstanding job; I personally thank them for their tireless efforts, work and commitment. In particular I thank Glenn for providing accurate and timely information in the many updates he has delivered over the past weeks.

I am proud to live in the great state of Victoria that pulls together in times such as these. The examples of courage, bravery, compassion and generosity have been extraordinary. The road ahead to recover, rebuild and reconstruct our communities will be long. I pray for those suffering from the bushfires; for those who have lost family and friends; for those who have been injured; and for those who have lost their homes. May God give them the strength and courage they need to rebuild their lives.

Once again, I offer my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my thoughts and prayers are with everyone touched by these horrific fires.

**Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon)** — I pay a brief tribute to a group of people who perhaps have not been mentioned yet: my former colleagues who work in public libraries and libraries around Victoria. There are a number of libraries in the bushfire affected areas. They include the libraries of Wellington, Latrobe, West Gippsland, Eastern Regional, Yarra Plenty, Murrindindi, High Country, Upper Murray, Mitchell, Goldfields and Wimmera. Their staff, in association with the State Library of Victoria, are working to support the communities in which they operate.

These are some of the quotes sent to the state library by some of our colleagues in libraries in the area. This one is from a public library in Mitchell:

Here at Mitchell we have had a fairly busy time coping with the devastation and loss suffered by many in our community. So many of the people who have lost all of their belongings have already contacted us apologising that they have lost some of our items. Why they are apologising for something that is out of their control is truly humbling ...

And another from the library services manager in Murrindindi, which said:

It is a particularly good feeling to hear from our friends out there in the community, as we are so embedded in the minute by minute work of just getting by and making some sense of the intense workload. At the moment I am typing up a list of people who are offering to help and the magnitude of these offers make us feel very humble. People have rung from far and wide, willing to drop everything and come to help.

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You may have seen our Kinglake office manager, Neesha Sinclair, on the news. She was interviewed explaining how she sheltered in a wombat hole with a wet blanket, to escape the furnace and unimaginable terror.

You are inclined to think it was a very big wombat or a very small Kinglake office manager, but she did very well to survive. The library services manager from Murrindindi continued:

The Yea office is operating and so is Alexandra Library, but in a perfunctory manner as no-one is reading, of course. We are just a place to be for those evacuees seeking a quieter place than the relief centres.

Libraries are the centre of many small townships, and it is great that they are still there to give support to the local people.

16:00 The state library is taking a leadership role in working with public libraries. To remind us that bushfires are part of our history it has on its website and also in its foyer, where it is collecting funds for the Red Cross, a condolence book and an image of William Strutt's epic painting of the terrible bushfires of 1851 called *Black Thursday*. We sometimes forget that bushfires have been with us for a very long time and have done huge damage to us in the past, although that was when our population was much smaller.

One of the very nice gestures has come from the Australian Publishers Association and the Australian Booksellers Association. They have made a joint offer to, where possible, replace all the education materials and library stocks lost in the fires. Getting a book stock back to kids and libraries in the area will be a great thing. I congratulate them on that effort. Of course, the state library, in conjunction with the public library network, will be working to help those communities in the future.

Just briefly on the local level, I would like to congratulate the Essendon State Emergency Service, whose members, under their manager, Sandra Faoro, have been very busy working in a distribution centre and sending goods backwards and forwards. At their lunch two weeks ago the Circolo Pensionati Italiani di Moonee Ponds, a very small group of Italian pensioners, raised a significant contribution of \$2300 for the *Il Globo* fund. Charlie Walker and other members of the Moonee Valley Cricket Club, in association with a number of other clubs, including Aberfeldie Park and Craigieburn cricket clubs, very quickly organised a social men's and women's cricket match last week and raised more than \$7000, which was a significant effort. Strathmore Rotary Club members spent all Saturday morning selling sausages at Boeing Reserve to raise funds.

The fact that so many people in places like Essendon, so far away from the bushfires, want to contribute says a great deal about the Victorian spirit, which my colleagues here have already spoken about today. On behalf of the people of Essendon, I also send my condolences to those affected by the bushfires.

**Mrs VICTORIA** (Bayswater) — I rise to give my sincerest condolences on behalf of Bayswater district and personally to all those who have lost loved ones and property. I think we all knew when we got up on 7 February that it was going to be a day like no other. The conditions from early on were certainly furnace-like. To walk outside and feel as if you were standing in front of a furnace or a hairdryer, was unique and something I had not felt for many years. I suppose it was inevitable that we were going to lose some lives and property, given the fact that we are in drought and the state is so dry. Of course none of us could foresee what was going to be the total at the end of the day.

So far we know that 210 people have tragically lost their lives, that more than 2000 homes have been lost and more than 7000 people have been displaced.

Like most MPs, I wanted to help out. I went to the Whittlesea staging area, where I was asked to help the Red Cross by taking some important medical and baby care items into the fire-affected area. The nurses, who had said that they would be very happy if I could help by driving up there with them, asked, 'Are you prepared?'. I said, 'Well, I don't know what I'm going to see. I presume there is a lot of burnt-out forestry and houses that are down'. They said, 'I don't think you can be prepared, but wait and see'.

I must say that even with my eyes open, sometimes when I am just sitting doing some work or having lunch or doing something else, I can see images that I saw that day, images that people really should not ever have to see. I can only think about those people who did make it out but were watching as cars crashed around them and neighbours were perishing.

I was also out at Yarra Glen. I can tell members that the police operations out there were working like clockwork under the guidance of Senior Sergeant Paul McBride from Ringwood police. That brings me to say a very heartfelt thankyou to not only all the members of Victoria Police and those who have come from interstate to relieve them, but also to members of the Country Fire Authority, people like Lex De Man, who is prominent in our CFA area. I thank also members of the State Emergency Service and the ambulance service, the army personnel who have come in to help out, and members of so many other organisations such

16:05