

# FIRE WISE

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## Appreciating the work of CFA crews

**CFA FIREFIGHTERS WERE HEAVILY INVOLVED in the fires in Bunyip and Yinnar South in early March. About 2000 firefighters mainly from CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFM Vic) were deployed to fight all the blazes in the South East Region which burnt a total of 100,000 hectares in the state's east.**

Gembrook resident **Paul Fry** sent a letter of appreciation to CFA Chief Officer **Steve Warrington** recently. The letter not only thanks the efforts of CFA personnel at the Bunyip fire but provides a fascinating insight into the fire from a resident's perspective.

Dear Steve,

I wanted to share my appreciation with you for what all the relevant groups did for our area in the recent Bunyip fires.

The fire began on the mountain range in front of our property and was swept down the east boundary of our neighbour's property by the northerly wind. At one point the wind, which was pushing the fire away from us, died down and the wall of flames that rose up was so large and long it seemed inconceivable that any of the folks homes on the other side of the flames could be saved, especially given the dense forest surrounding most of the dwellings.

The best description I can think of for what was in front of us is simply apocalyptic. Even with four years of preparation, an air tight fire bunker, two fire hoses, 10,000 litres of water, a specialised pump and diesel generator we fled when we could, which was early Saturday night. As we were leaving with our children we let four very brave souls know that we were going (as they) continued to station themselves on our street corner to defend our (house) and neighbouring properties.

The irony of us, the owners fleeing and strangers staying back to defend our home and animals, is a humbling image that I will never forget. It doesn't matter whether they were volunteers or paid career fire fighters because no amount of money would entice the average person to work in such peril.

There were definitely times we would have loved the helicopters and ground crews to stay the course around our area, but it was clear with our view, they were needed more elsewhere.

That being said, they did magically reappear just before the sh\*t hit the fan on a number of occasions.

After the extreme danger passed I was so impressed to see again the various groups, CFA, forest fire management and rangers etc taking great care to keep properties safe, keep domestic animals fed and watered as well as taking the time to keep us informed.

I know the system you all work under is not perfect and that your work environment is unpredictable and deadly, which makes me respect all the personnel even more for continuing to place their lives in danger for the sake of others.

In an area like ours, even with the best preparation, equipment and tightest management, there was going to be costly damage to some homes and loss of much loved pets and livestock.

We thought on a number of occasions we would be joining the number of grieving for their loss because the odds were so great. The fire was apocalyptic in size, was pushed along and directed by an indiscriminate wind that knew no boundaries through surroundings that were tinder dry and encircle many of our homes.

I watched this crisis unfold for 24 hours from our property on top of a small range and have heard the first-hand accounts of what happened after my family and I had evacuated.

The unflinching courage I saw, tireless effort, warmth, care and compassion in 99 percent of all personnel is enough to restore my wider faith in people.

Thank you for making a difference.

Paul Fry, Gembrook

## CALEB'S COMPETITION AMBITION REALISED

**THE RECENT VFBV STATE RURAL CHAMPIONSHIPS AT BENDIGO provided a huge highlight for Wallington Fire Brigade, the Neyenhuis family and CFA in general when Wallington Fire Brigade member Caleb Neyenhuis, who is totally blind, competed in the Tanker - Priming and Pumping event at the senior championships.**

Caleb who is 17, recently joined Wallington Brigade where his grandfather **Gerry**, father **Greg**, uncle **Michael** and siblings **Bianca** and **Eliza** are also members.

This has been a life-long ambition for Caleb who has been brought up around the brigade and competition track but had to wait until he turned 17 as the brigade does not have juniors.

Caleb was diagnosed with retinoblastoma as an infant and lost his eye sight completely at age three.

A very enthusiastic young man Caleb is determined to have a go at everything. So when the opportunity came to compete in the Tanker - Priming and Pumping event at this year's senior State championships he didn't hesitate. And his team mates at Wallington Brigade's competition team were just as excited.

An announcement was made prior to the heat in which Wallington competed and spectators and other competitors from team in the heat applauded at the conclusion.

"It was a proud moment for

everyone and there were a few tears of immense pride shed," according to grand father Gerry.

Plans are currently underway so that Caleb may compete in the Low Down Pump event as well next year with this thought to be put to the State Competition Committee at its June meeting.

At brigade level Wallington Fire Brigade has welcomed Caleb as a senior member. This shows that it is a truly inclusive entity and the hope is that this may encourage other CFA brigades to do the same and have a 'flow on effect' for other people who may have a disability but still have an enormous amount to contribute to the organisation.

Without doubt Caleb, with his outstanding attitude to life, will be of immense benefit as a member. The brigade will do some planning in the near future to determine a role for Caleb: this will perhaps be in the area of communications.

And Caleb feels right at home around the brigade and has taken it all in his stride.

Caleb has been involved in



sports such as cricket and football and currently plays football in a competition for the blind, this being sponsored by AFL.

Caleb Neyenhuis competes in the Tanker - Priming and Pumping event at the 2019 State championships. It has been his life-long ambition to compete with Wallington Brigade.

## HINO SPONSORSHIP APPRECIATED



**VOLUNTEER Fire Brigades Victoria is pleased to have Hino Australia as its major sponsor of the State Rural championships since 2013.**

It is hoped this mutually beneficial partnership continues well into the future.

At the 2019 State championships VFBV President **Neve Jones** (pictured in the centre of the photograph at left) and VFBV CEO **Andrew Ford** (on right) thanked Hino Australia for its ongoing support and presented a plaque in appreciation of its annual ongoing support of this event.

The plaque was accepted by Corporate Business Manager - Government **Tom Ayrton**, who said Hino Australia was pleased to support CFA volunteers in this manner and proud to be associated with CFA.

## CFA leads way in RCH Appeal

**CFA MEMBERS have led the way on Good Friday, raising and collecting a total of \$1,612,671 towards the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal.**

Victorians have rallied behind this appeal with the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne one of the leading hospitals in the world.

CFA has a long and rich history of collecting money for the Good Friday Appeal by rattling tins and hosting activities to raise as much as they can.

CFA has had a strong partnership with the Good Friday Appeal since 1951, with more than \$30 million raised.

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