



The Blacksmiths' Tree

Blacksmiths worldwide have come together to grow a tree from their forges and fires, creating more than 3,000 gum leaves from stainless steel or copper, to be added to a forged gumtree, which will stand as a memorial to the events of 7 February – to everyone who was lost, to the bravery shown, and to the spirit of renewal.

The Australian Blacksmiths Association (Victoria) Inc met with the Association's committee last week and offered to locate the tree in Strathewen when the tree project was completed.

We were deeply touched by the Blacksmiths' offer to locate the tree in Strathewen, and gratefully accepted their offer on behalf of the community.

We will now incorporate the Blacksmith's Tree as a central element in our thinking about how best to establish a memorial to the events of 7 February.

Strathewen Community Centre

The Strathewen Community Centre, at the foot of Bowden Spur Road, is now up and running. Soup nights (gourmet fare – just try it and see) every Thursday from 6 pm, and Footy nights on Friday evenings from 6.30 pm, have already become popular fixtures. Access can be obtained at any other time by contacting a committee member, or just by dropping by, as someone's there most of the time.

The Community Centre has a 42 inch television, x-box, and dvd player – all owned by the community for enjoyment by the community, so please use with care.

There are comfortable chairs, and a decent supply of hot drinks and basic food stuffs.

It is a nice place to meet for a cuppa while catching up with friends – feel free to bring visitors along too.

Heating is via two reverse cycle air conditioners - please turn off after use; there's a vacuum cleaner provided and we're relying on people using the facility to leave it clean and tidy.

We have a good supply of pamphlets on a variety of matters of interest, plus minutes from committee meetings and a current notice board which advertises what is going on.

See you there!

We need your help

With the stress, confusion, and amount of time required to deal with insurance, rebuilding plans, permits and the like, it is easy to overlook our own health and well-being. The Resident Support Sub-committee has been formed to provide help at a personal level. It is hoped that a range of activities and services can be provided that will help bring people together, increase community morale, and rekindle enthusiasm.

We are investigating ways to achieve this and have recently mailed-out a short survey, seeking input from all members of the association. Please take some time to respond to the survey as it will provide valuable information and form a basis for the programs developed.

At this stage we expect that a number of group activities aimed towards children and young adults will be organised. These could include things like day trips to the snow or the beach (in summer), as well as art-based programs where kids can create felt landscapes or iconic flags. Family fun days and music/variety events may also be organised.

Renewin' Strathewen

Supporting the Recovery



We are already working to engage the services of health professionals, and to tap into the vast array of community services available through DHS, Nillumbik and a host of other organisations who have already indicated their desire to help.

The Resident Support Sub-committee is comprised of; Mary Avola, Diana Robertson, Georgina Robertson Stecher, Barbara Gregory, Turid Foyn-Johansen, Barbara Joyce and Peter McLennan. The group meets weekly and anyone who is interested is most welcome to join – please contact any one of us.

Footy Night

The Strathewen Community Centre (foot of School Ridge Road) is the place to be on Friday nights if you enjoy watching football and catching up with some of the locals. Beer, soft drinks, snacks, and pies are all provided from 6:30 onwards. Games start at 8:30 and the big-screen TV and comfy furniture allow plenty of people to follow the action. There's also a pool table and dartboard to keep you amused if the football doesn't suffice. Everyone is welcome – it's not just for the blokes.

Jon Faine and 774 Radio

Through the efforts of Michael Chapman and the Arthurs Creek/Strathewen CFA Brigade, 774 Radio presenter Jon Faine visited Strathewen on 20th July 2009 to see for himself the devastation, and to listen to the accounts of brigade members and residents. Subsequently Jon Faine decided upon Strathewen as the location for his program to examine the release of the Bushfire Royal Commission's Interim Report. This program has served to raise the profile of Strathewen, and should assist us in ensuring that our renewal efforts attract the necessary official support.

We will rebuild

The Association's Building Facilitation Sub-committee meets weekly, and has combined resources with those of the St. Andrews Bushfire Recovery Association to cover many issues of immediate interest, arranging presentations and workshops to assist with the rebuilding challenge.

Well attended presentations have already been held on:

- ***Thinking About Building***
- ***Septic and Plumbing***
- ***Power and Electricity*** (run on Sunday 16 August)

A further presentation has been arranged for Sunday 23rd August from 2pm until 4 pm at the Arthurs Creek Hall, on building materials and their suitability for bushfire attack levels.

Other presentations are being planned, covering Energy Rating, Building Design, and a further materials session.

We are also arranging a forum, to be held in the next few weeks, with the Shire of Nillumbik Planning and Building Departments to help explain the current process of obtaining planning and building approval to fire affected residents. In the meantime, Sub-committee members are able to give a general description of how the new planning process works. Feel free to contact us.

Details and flyers will be issued once these presentations are finalised.

Please send feedback and suggestions about forums to the Sub-committee (Karl Apted: apted@activ8.net.au or 0418 350 345 or any other Association committee members).



The 1000 point scheme

VBARRA have had many donations 'in kind' rather than as money. They have devised a 1000 point scheme, designed to assist in meeting some of the immediate needs of blue card holders; the scheme features store vouchers from David Jones, IKEA and Best and Less, as well as vouchers for flights and holiday accommodation for a much needed break !

Anne Hafeel is co-ordinating the scheme for our area. Blue card holders can ring Anne directly on 0400 313 030 to make an appointment in order to 'spend' their 1000 points – she's available at the Hurstbridge Hub on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but is already in big demand !

Building Advisers working for you

Association representatives met with the head of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority's house building organisation, Max Ginn, to discuss what assistance should be made available to people who are rebuilding.

Max confirmed that VBARRA had just employed four full-time Building Advisers, whose job it is to **provide free independent advice and assistance to people at every stage of the rebuilding process**. They are all experienced former house builders who understand the extent of the rebuilding challenge and can provide help with planning processes, obtaining finance, insurance issues, dealing with architects, drafting requirements, and sourcing legal advice.

Book a time for a discussion about your own situation via the Hurstbridge Hub on 9433 3111 – the Building Advisers will be available:

Tuesdays from 9.00 am until 11.30 am

Fridays from 1.00 pm until 4 pm

Temporary housing

The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority have just committed to building a further temporary village on public land at Whittlesea, based on the Kinglake model, but they will **not** be providing temporary housing units for installation on individual land sites.

VBARRA have provided examples of temporary housing units that might be of interest to anyone planning to put a temporary unit on their land site, costed at around \$ 60,000 plus installation – copies available from David Brown at miscellany@ozemail.com.au

The association is exploring with a number of charitable organisations whether support can be obtained for the placement of temporary housing units on individual land sites, to enable people to return to live in Strathewen, rather than having to rent accommodation elsewhere.

Environment recovery plan

The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority has now put together an Environment Team and they will be working with bushfire communities to deliver the environment component of a Bushfire Recovery Plan for each fire-affected area.

Their focus is on natural resource management – broadly this covers vegetation, water, sustainable land use, erosion and public land.

The government departments involved are the Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE) and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), as well as Local Government. DSE agencies involved are Melbourne Water, Port Philip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Parks Victoria.



The Nillumbik Environment Recovery Group has been active for some time. It includes representatives from the Council, CMA, Strathewen, Arthurs Creek, St Andrews and Christmas Hills. Prior to the Association's incorporation Kylee Woods, Steve Pascoe, Malcolm Hackett, Bronwyn South and Barrie Tully have attended meetings on behalf of the community.

The Association needs to work closely with VBBRA and Nillumbik Council to develop the environment component of the Bushfire Recovery Plan. We want to formalise membership of the Environment Sub-committee of the Association – please contact Bronwyn South on 0414 882 946 or Matthew Gravette on 0419 386 343 if you are interested in joining us.

T-Shirts

Helen Collier, a resident of Toolangi, was so moved by the effects of February 7th that she felt she needed to do something to help. With her connections with businesses throughout the Yarra Valley she decided that she would direct her efforts towards something that could benefit local businesses in the fire-affected areas as well as the local communities.

The result is "Giveashirt". Based on the iconic "I ♥ New York" T-shirt design, Helen has had a range of shirts printed up with words New York crossed out and the name of one of the fire-affected communities added in place. The shirts are available to fire-affected businesses and communities and \$5.00 from every sale goes directly to the seller's nominated cause.

Our shirts, I ♥ (New York) Strathewen, will be available from the Community Centre in Strathewen, Strathewen Primary School, Workin' Clobber and Women's Clobber in Hurstbridge as well as via the www.strathewen.vic.au website.

If you would like a shirt or would be interested in selling the shirts, please contact the association by e-mail on: scra@tpg.com.au

Chookin

Calling on relatives and friends of Strathewen Primary School students.

You are invited to join in a project which involves the knitting of life size chooks, one for each interested child at the school.

The children are currently colouring in a drawing of a hen in the colours that they like and this will be given to a knitter to make a dream come true. Alpaca wool, needles and patterns will be provided. All that will be required is some of your time to bring an object of love and warmth into their lives.

"Why a chook?", I hear you ask. Chooks are something familiar from the children's world, a symbol of regeneration, and they make you smile. (Editorial warning: this activity is addictive and contagious, and provokes chook envy from onlookers).

If you are interested in becoming one of the knitters, please contact Barbara Joyce from Strathewen on 9714 8553 or email barbara@dunmoochin.org

Labyrinth

The Association has been contacted by a group who are keen to build a Labyrinth for the Strathewen community.

Labyrinths date back to ancient times and have been used for relaxation, contemplation and meditation. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is not a puzzle that needs to be solved – a labyrinth is a path. Walking the labyrinth allows one to reflect, ponder, and contemplate the past, the present and the future.

While no formal plans are in place, the labyrinth could form part of the setting for Blacksmith's Tree or be incorporated into a contemplative garden or memorial.



Help with land management

Property management plan

A good starting point may be a property management plan. These are quite comprehensive and could potentially be a “one stop shop”, rather than going through all the different agencies. Property management plans can be developed for all types and sizes of properties, and assistance is available. Anyone wishing to develop a plan for their property, or seeking a copy of the template, please contact either Tim (**9433 3207**) or Donna (**9433 3216**) at Nillumbik Council.

A property management plan folder is available at the Strathewen Community Centre for you to browse through.

Department of Primary Industries

DPI's bushfire recovery program focuses on the provision of advice on pasture management, pest plant and animal control, erosion protection, animal health, livestock feed planning, crop and horticulture management and reforestation. DPI services can be reached via the Victorian Bushfire Information Line **1800 240 667**.

Melbourne Water

If you have a significant waterway on your property, including a gully, that acts as a drain for surrounding land of more than 60ha you can get assistance through the Stream Frontage Program. This includes fencing, erosion control and revegetation. Contact Anna Zsoldos on **9235 1476** or **0409 509 451** to organise a site visit.

Nillumbik Shire Council

- **Erosion** - Tim O'Donnell is a Rural Extension Officer working on erosion problems. Tim can be contacted on **9433 3207** or email tim.odonnell@nillumbik.vic.gov.au Nillumbik is also in the process of employing a Works Co-ordinator to support Tim.
- **Weeds** – Lori Arthur is the Land Management Officer and co-ordinator of the Nillumbik Environment Recovery Group. She can provide information and funding advice. You can contact her on **9433 3211** or email Lorene.Arthur@nillumbik.vic.gov.au
- **Native vegetation** – The Nillumbik Environment Recovery Group is planning a field day in Strathewen with environmental scientist Dr Graeme Lorimer. More information to follow. Many residents are asking for assistance with monitoring regrowth on their properties. Hopefully this can be delivered through the Landcare Buddies network.

Strathewen Landcare

The Strathewen Landcare group will continue the programs it was running before the fire. They are currently engaging a contractor to do roadside weed-spraying. The equipment trailer will be replaced as soon as possible allowing residents access to weed control and replanting equipment. The group is also preparing a folder that gathers together all the information that has been touched on above. This will be left at the Strathewen Community Centre.

Bushfire recovery information and links can be found on www.strathewenlandcare.org.au, and we are working to provide a single source of information for Association members.



Diamond Creek Rotary Fencing Trailer

Members of Diamond Creek Rotary arrived at "Soup Night" last Thursday and presented a cheque for \$16,000 to fund the Landcare group's proposal for a fully equipped fencing trailer. A powered steel post rammer, petrol powered drills and post hole augers, generator and quality tools will mean that our volunteer labour can get so much more done. Details on access to the trailer will be available shortly.

Lions Club Tool Library

The tool shed will soon be a reality. Malcolm and Faye have kindly offered to site the Tool Library on their property so it will be close to the Community Centre. The Lions Club and Nillumbik Shire have also agreed that St Andrews residents need the same support and will be providing an additional container shed and tools managed as an annexe to the Strathewen Tool Library. Details of the tools and borrowing system will be provided asap.

St Andrews Invisible

Strathewen residents will be familiar with the feeling that the loss of life, destruction and grief in your community has been overlooked by higher profile locations. For Strathewen this situation is being corrected through the efforts of individuals, our Association and the tenacity of the Arthurs Creek/Strathewen CFA Brigade. The St Andrews Recovery Committee continues to battle the perception that its fire affected residents are part of Kinglake. We will take every opportunity to correct these misperceptions and work together with the St Andrews Recovery Association to support our residents' common interests.

Concrete Help

Following very successful meetings with managers of Boral building divisions the Strathewen/St Andrews Building Sub-committees can now direct residents to contacts who will help with discounts on Boral products; windows, flooring, bricks, cladding, lining and concrete. This will be particularly helpful for owner builders who will be able to access at least "trade price." For residents buying concrete for house slabs and shed floors this can mean a reduction from \$190 per cu/metre delivered down to \$155. Contact a member of the Building Sub-committee for contact details.

Shed Discount

The Building Sub-committee have attempted to gain discounts from shed suppliers too but this is a pretty cut throat business and the pickings are already slim. However, Callum Donoghue has managed to secure a 3% Strathewen community discount from a supplier in Campbellfield, with what appeared to be a decent range with a choice of specifications. Contact Callum for details - cmdonoghue@activ8.net.au 0414 932 051.

Owner Builders

People who wish to rebuild as "owner builders" can now apply for a "Certificate of Consent" from the building Commission as a "fire affected property" and the Commission will fully subsidise the cost of the application. Make sure you ask.

Solar rebates

The Association is lobbying relevant government departments about extending recently discontinued water heating and solar electricity rebates to those who were affected by the fires and were prevented from taking advantage of the schemes. To be continued.....



School report

At this stage we continue to operate out of Wattle Glen Primary School. As most people are aware we were able to set our school up in some empty portable classrooms at the school around 20km away from Strathewen immediately after Feb 7th.

Our students travel to and from school using four separate buses- two existing secondary school buses and two mini buses. This accommodates families that are still living in the area and those who are displaced.

We continue to have counselling available on site for parents, staff and students, provided through the Department of Education. We also have the services of a Chaplain.

With so many disruptions to regular school programs, we have been very mindful of keeping the learning going and offering lots of support for our students. They were so keen to be back in the swing of classroom routines, that we were straight into the teaching and learning on Wednesday February 11th- and we haven't stopped.

We have received wonderful support from local communities as well as from others both nationally and internationally. We have been happy to share and display many cards and letters of support which have come our way. A range of donations from individuals, schools, community organisations and businesses have also been gratefully accepted and acknowledged.

We continue to operate a 'highlights' program for our students, which involves planned special outings and events. These give our students something to look forward to, are a great distraction when things get tough and quite often see our students travelling out of the local area and off to enjoy new experiences.

Strathewen Primary School was a wonderful school, which was well resourced and equipped with up to date technology and fantastic gear. Our aim is to open our new school, well equipped and ready once again to run the fabulous programs which we were well known for.

Here in our temporary home we have our chicken coup outside the classrooms and the worm farms, composts and vegetable patches set up. Our school band is up and running, we have a film making project on the go and we're already working on sewing projects for the Whittlesea Show.

We were fortunate to have Wattle Glen available to us, allowing us to maintain our own school identity and community during such a difficult time. The Wattle Glen community have shown great support for us all.

At this stage our school site has been cleared and the arborists have completed their work. The surveyors have been out at the school and our Re-building budget has been allocated. We have appointed our architectural firm and our Re-building group has been meeting regularly with the architects, working on the possible siting of buildings, carparking, play areas, gardens etc.

We are working on completing a new Master Plan for our school. We meet again next week, out on site, to view some initial sketches. We are working to ensure that we make the best possible use of our rather unusual school site, maximising flat play areas and creating the best possible learning environment that we possibly can.

We have encouraged our students to list what was important to them at our original school- the things that they would like to see returned to their new school and they have



volunteered loads of ideas. They also came up with suggestions for new areas we could develop- such as the long 'wished for' cricket nets.

Our students look forward to returning to Strathewen next year and in the meantime we plan to visit the site as a school group during the building process so that students can feel part of the progress. It goes without saying that we're really looking forward to getting back to our home!

Time Out – one family's experience

Early in our recovery, we were offered accommodation in Bali by generous and wonderful people "if we needed a break". We didn't see much chance of getting some time-out any time during 2009 and put this offer in the 'List of Offers'. Unbelievably all the ducks started to line up, and with the urging of our supporters and an awareness of our growing exhaustion, we explored the possibility of getting away for awhile.

My 12 month secondment was drawing to a close at the end of June, Ali had leave stacked up, Cam had built up a heap of leave from his away from home engineering projects and Jess had broken her leg in a horse riding fall and could not work for two months (challenges and opportunities!). Ali's work colleagues fund-raised for us and urged us to "do something special". With everything coming together (including replacement passports, travel bags and our limited summer clothes) we headed to 'paradise' for 4 weeks.

The time-out has been a wonderful blessing. It allowed us to leave behind a lot of stuff that we have all been carrying since February, spend time as a family and recharge our batteries. The warmth, the sun and the complete relaxation was a wonderful prescription for renewing our souls. A special bonus was the opportunity to make

our annual pilgrimage to East Timor, which had given up any hope of this year. We were able to catch up with our East Timorese and ex-pat friends in Dili. It was truly humbling to have the East Timorese so empathetic and concerned for all of us affected by the bushfire, given the decades of violence and threat they have suffered and continue to struggle with.

In our return we have noticed many changes in our Strathy community. The community centre has turned from an ugly duckling to a wonderfully warm and comfortable place to bring our community together. The Association Committee is off and running with vision workshops, operating subcommittees, liaison with organisations and government agencies, and an enormous workload. The various agencies including VBRRRA and Nillumbik Council appear to be finally getting organised (we can only hope). The pastures are regrowing, and in our gullies' moss and algae are beginning the natural process of restoring life to the sterilised landscape. Unfortunately the fairies have not been particularly active during our absence and the visit to our block shocked us once more with just how much damage has been done and the enormous amount of work that is ahead of us. Counter to this is our growing understanding and commitment to taking our time, proceeding slowly and accepting that whatever it takes is whatever it takes.

We are warmed by the commitment by so many people contributing to the renewal of our community and, despite the enormity of what lies ahead, are keen to get back into it. We strongly encourage everyone to make time for a good break, relax, restore energy reserves, gain new perspectives and refresh your soul.



Financial Seminar

Centrelink Financial Information Service will be holding a free seminar on investing safely, the choices available to anyone managing money, and how compensation payments or insurance pay-outs impact on Centrelink entitlements, in particular the pensions/allowances income and assets test.

**Thursday 27 August 2009 at 6.00 pm,
at the Hurstbridge Community Centre
50 Greysarps Rd, Hurstbridge**

Registration is essential, on 9433 3111 (option 5) or by e-mail to rcc@nillumbik.vic.gov.au

Please note that this is **not** the Hurstbridge Hub (which is in the Bowling Club), but is on the same road, just a little further down.

Business Advice

Daryl Brooke has been engaged by Nillumbik Shire Council to coordinate a program to assist your business. Any type of business, any issues, any type of help.

Daryl is an independent business operator with a background in helping small business owners. Total confidentiality, if required.

His is offering advice and assistance with restarting, rebuilding, reequipping, restaffing your business; how you can change, improve, grow, shift, or get what ever you need, when you are ready.

Hurstbridge Hub at the Hurstbridge Bowls Club every Wednesday from 1-5 PM.
35 Graysharps Rd, Hurstbridge (The Hurstbridge Bowling Club building)

Or phone 0433 948 258 anytime.

Some grateful thanks and acknowledgements

Our local Brigade

Our Arthurs Creek / Strathewen CFA Brigade have been steadfast in their support for fire affected residents since cutting their way into Strathewen following the fire. From providing fuel, water and facilities, supporting community events, to co-ordinating fodder reserves or building laundry blocks the local brigade have jumped in where they see a need. What a great team of local people !

Fencing champions

Many property owners in Strathewen owe a debt of gratitude to fencing volunteers from across Australia particularly those from the Victorian Farmers Federation co-ordinated by Alec and Julie Sutherland and the Uniting Church fencing crews co-ordinated by Rod James. There's still a lot to do but haven't they done a fantastic job up to this point !

The Hurstbridge team

We also owe our thanks to the generous volunteers of the Hurstbridge Bushfire Recovery Centre who have worked tirelessly to support people living locally from all over the fire affected area. They have built up some great resources, knowledge and contacts and if you need help they are only too happy to respond.

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