

Letter to the editor

Dear Sir,

The recent bushfires in Victoria, and floods in Queensland, have again brought to the fore the invaluable work of volunteers. Many people gave up their time so willingly to help combat the fires and then to assist affected communities with their recovery, a process that will be ongoing for a long time to come. Volunteers have been involved in all aspects of

these devastating natural disasters.

More than 5.4 million Australians volunteer each year and the most recent estimate suggests they deliver over \$700 million of value to the nation. I think that is a very conservative estimate.

National Volunteer Week will be held from 11th to 17th May this year and it is a time to focus our energies into thanking all of

Australia's volunteers for the amazing work they do in their communities. More information is available at www.volunteeringaustralia.org/nvw

Where would we be without our volunteers?
Cary Pedicini

CEO
Volunteering Australia

Telstra helps seniors click with technology

Grants are now open for Telstra Connected Seniors® to fund programs which help older Australians learn to use technology to stay connected to their families, friends and communities.

Not-for-profit community organisations with a primary member base of people over the age of 60 are eligible to apply. Grant amounts range up to \$5,000 for local organisations and up to \$50,000 for state and territory organisations.

Applications are now open online at www.telstraseniors.com.au until March 20, 2009 (5pm AEST).

Programs that receive funding may incorporate tasks such as paying bills and shopping online, organising social events using SMS, and staying in touch with grandchildren through email and video calling.

"Older people are discovering new ways to enjoy their hobbies and interests using technology. In fact, the fastest growing group of internet users is people aged between 65 and 74," said David Moffatt, Group Managing Director of Telstra Consumer.

"This demonstrates the passion older Australians have for new ways to communicate."

Premier opens Epping to Chatswood Rail Link

NSW Premier Nathan Rees and Transport Minister David Campbell rode the first train on the \$2.3 billion Epping to Chatswood Rail Link and officially opened the line at the new Macquarie University Station. Premier Rees said the impressive new link included underground train stations at Macquarie University, Macquarie Park, and North Ryde.



"This is a multi-billion investment in jobs, in Sydney's transport needs and in a better future," Mr Rees said. Mr Rees said the new link was made up of state-of-the-art stations, wide open concourses and 12.5 kilometres of underground rail tunnel.

"This is an impressive piece of major public transport infrastructure."

"Over 12,500 people worked a combined total of 13 million hours on this project, drilling the tunnels, putting down the tracks and fitting out the stations. They deserve to be congratulated on a job well done."

"The new rail link will deliver huge

benefits for local businesses and the University.

"This rail link opens up two booming business and education precincts with Macquarie Park home to around 30,000 employees and the University having some 30,000 students and 2,000 staff."

"The Rail Link will continue to create jobs and stimulate the local economy at a time when business needs a good boost."

Transport Minister David Campbell said the new service would first run as a

shuttle between Epping and Chatswood before being integrated into the rest of the CityRail network.

"The trains will operate between Epping and Chatswood every 15 minutes in both directions on weekdays and at weekends, operating from around 6am to 9.30pm," Mr Campbell said.

"The link will put around 12,000 extra people on the City Rail network every day, once fully integrated."

"Fast, efficient public transport is key to commercial expansion in North Ryde, which is set to become the fourth largest business district in Australia over the next 25 years."

"Once integrated into the wider CityRail network the Rail Link will deliver benefits to passengers in other parts of Sydney, such as those who live on the Western Line."

"The new link will free up space between Strathfield and the CBD allowing some peak train services to be extended and new services to be slotted in."

Premier Rees said to celebrate the opening, commuters travelling between Epping and Chatswood to any of the new stations would be able to do so for free up until June 8. "It's important to note that travelling along the Epping to Chatswood rail link will be free of charge only if you are alighting at one of those stations on the link," Mr Rees said.

"Today's opening is a celebration and a day to thank those who have made the opening of this link possible."

National Day of Mourning

NSW Premier, Nathan Rees encouraged the NSW community to continue to show its strong support for Victoria by being part of National Day of Mourning proceedings today.

"Like never before, our Victorians friends need to know we're here for them after the devastating bushfires," Mr Rees said.

"The NSW community can be rightly proud of the support and help that we have offered to our neighbours."

"There are many ways today that we can continue to show that support."

Mr Rees said the NSW Government will broadcast the National Day of Mourning service live from Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena on big screens at two Live Sites in the metropolitan region. The venues will be the Sydney Opera House Forecourt and The Overflow grassed area at Sydney Olympic Park.

"This will give Sydney residents and visitors a place to come together and view the official proceedings."

The Live Sites are free and open to everyone. The broadcast will commence at 11am and is expected to conclude at 12:30pm. If people are unable to come to one of the sites,

they will still be able to watch the service as it will be televised on channels 7, 9, 10 and the ABC.

A second Sydney Opera House Forecourt Live Site event, Arts Unite, will broadcast live from Sydney Opera House Concert Hall at 5pm.

This is a sold-out bushfire benefit concert featuring performances from Australia's leading arts organisations, which has already raised more than \$100,000.

Compered by Guy Noble, the 90-minute concert features performances from Sydney Symphony, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Opera Australia, Sydney Theatre Company, The Australian Ballet and Bell Shakespeare.

Mr Rees will represent New South Wales in Melbourne and pass on the state's condolences to the people of Victoria.

The NSW Government has also placed a condolence book online where people can post messages to Victoria. It can be accessed from the NSW Government website at www.nsw.gov.au.

Condolences will be regularly forwarded to the Victorian Government. A condolence book is also available for signing at Parliament House, Macquarie Street Sydney.