

A DRY ARGUMENT

D9700 takes the lead in drought relief

With the drought worsening, Rotary District 9700, NSW, has appointed a drought liaison officer.

He is Rotarian Gary Roberts, of the Rotary Club of Murrumbidgee, NSW.

His duties will be to determine the needs of people affected by the drought and to attempt to find solutions.

In announcing the appointment, District Governor John Egan said those needs could include counselling, cash for families to manage Christmas Day, a holiday on the coast, fodder, organising a community barbecue, being involved with an “adopt a family” scheme, or even forming a men’s support group.

Mr Egan said he was deeply concerned that many rural families would again be facing another stressful Christmas, especially families with small children.

“The first step is to recognise the stress and difficulties that need to be addressed in this district,” DG Egan said.

“We need to find out from Rotarians in and around our District the needs of their neighbours and friends.

“We would also like to hear from anyone who has a holiday house or unit on the coast who would be willing to offer a rent-free holiday to a family in need.

“This important stress break can help families immensely.”

As part of his role as drought liaison officer, Mr Roberts has undertaken to coordinate the accommodation as well as support services with neighbouring Rotary Districts to ensure a wonderful holiday.

Offers of help or further information can be obtained by contacting Gary Roberts on (02) 6921 2820 (w), (02) 6921 3135 (h) or email: gary@waggachiro.com.au. ■



District 9700 Drought Liaison Officer Gary Roberts with DG John Egan.

The Governor’s appeal

I’m writing to let you know the situation in 9700. Unfortunately it’s the same story in most Districts with country areas.

Until late July I thought we were going to have a good season. We had a beautiful break in April which allowed sowing with huge confidence. The crops got away really well, but then of course the rain didn’t follow up. It was especially cruel as the season offered so much promise.

Last year was a disaster. This year is the same. Most farmers are cutting crop for hay. What was going to be grain for record prices is going into sheep and cattle, with much less revenue.

With all of this comes the trauma of Depression. Families are really suffering. Not only has their income been cut, many face huge debts which just keep mounting. Many breadwinners are feeling that they are failures. It’s a dangerous state of mind which is resulting in suicide.

What can be done? Many clubs are running mental health awareness programs under the ARHRF banner and these are effective. Cootamundra club held a program recently and 700 people attended. Cootamundra has 2500 citizens.

West Wyalong was thrown a free drought-buster party by three Sydney clubs.

A huge turnout gave them a few hours to forget the dry and they realise that they are not alone, others do care and are trying to help. The kids also find it hard. They are going without things other kids take for granted and feel the tension their parents experience. It is tough for them too.

If your clubs are thinking of doing something for these people, please encourage them not to send food or goods as retailers there depend on agriculture. It is better if goods could be sourced from them. The gift then has a double effect.

Farmers need support. Governments are responding, but it’s the sense of failure and isolation that needs addressing. The Lindfield, St Ives and Turrumurra clubs “Give a Hand to Bland” initiative for West Wyalong was excellent. Others have given drought-affected kids a holiday at the beach and local clubs are running Mental Health forums which are successfully serving as circuit breakers.

Many of us are facing this same problem in our Districts. Have you any successful programs you can share? ■

John Egan

Rotary Club of Wollundry-Wagga Wagga, NSW

Governor, District 9700