

Local student organizes fundraising events for Oz wildfires

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

A local 12-year-old has organized two fundraisers to raise funds to donate to wildfire relief in Australia.

Australia has suffered a tragic and devastating set of bushfires since late July of 2019. It is pronounced to be one of the worst wildfires Australia has seen in decades. The fires have destroyed over 3,000 homes in the state of New South Wales.

Because of the dry, hot weather in Australia, they endure fire seasons every year, where natural causes lead to fires lighting up and spreading. But 24 people have been charged with purposely setting bushfires and 183 people with fire-related cases against them in the past 12 months.

The real sufferers of the bushfires in Australia, are the animals. A professor of ecology at the University of Sydney estimated the number of wildlife that have been killed due to the bushfires has hit one billion. One. Billion.

Communities world-wide are continuously hosting fundraisers, either online or through in-person events to raise funds for Australia. 12-year-old Marcus Melfi has organized two events to raise funds for the Australia relief.

"I was first inspired at school. My teacher, Mrs. Isopo is always getting us engaged in learning and because of this we had read an article about Greta Thunberg. I thought about how if she is young and could make a difference then I could too. I had been hearing about what was happening in Australia and right away knew that I wanted to help support. I looked up Red Cross and realized to make a big impact, I needed to do something big like a community event," said Marcus.

He contacted Landmark Cinema and Skyview Lanes to run the idea of his fundraisers and they got right on board. Marcus showed true initiative by developing and printing posters to advertise these events.

"It is important to help Australia because of how devastating the fires have been and because of the numbers. Since over 1 billion animals have died, 20 adults and children have died and over 13 million acres of land has been lost I think it was very important that we helped Australia," said Melfi. "I also really think that together we are stronger and can do amazing things and can help make a difference. I put together these events quickly because of the urgency of this matter."

Melfi is a bright and ambitious 12-year-old who does what he can to give back. When he isn't playing hockey, getting his black belt at Tae Kwon Do or travelling, he's raising money and walking in the Toronto Walk for Autism, which he has done for years. With his mother's help, he reached out to The Exchange to see what he can do to help and be more involved in the community.

He continues to ask for donations for the cause. The first event at Landmark Cinema, held on Feb. 22, was a huge success, with 105 seats sold. Now, Marcus is looking forward to the next event on Feb. 29 at Skyview Lanes.

"Around \$2,000 has been raised so far. My goal is \$5,000. I sold out all 105 seats in the theatre on Feb. 22 and am except good numbers for Feb. 29. I am also hoping to make extra money from raffle sales. So far, I have sold half the lanes available for the bowling event but would like to see every lane full on the 29th. I have 8 lanes still available from 12:00-1:00, 3 lanes still available from 1:30-2:30 and 4 lanes still available from 3:00 to 4:00. Raffle tickets can also be purchase at the bowling event," said Melfi.

To purchase tickets or to donate contact Marcus Melfi at mmhelpingaustralia@gmail.com. He has also created a GoFundMe page under the name [mmhelpingaustralia](#), to gather donations as well.

"I hope together we can raise \$5,000. My hope is to get a hold of the mayor and see if he would get on board with this and for Mr. Allan Thompson to pick the raffles on March 1 as well as be present when I present the cheque to Red Cross," he commented.