

WORD ON THE STREET

"I think the economic times have caused an epidemic of robberies. People are laid off or losing money and turning to crime to support themselves."

Stephen J. White, police chief of Doylestown Township

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The Intelligencer

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On this date in 1861, the American Civil War began as Confederate forces bombarded Fort Sumter in South Carolina.



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Frank Cseri models his Australian fire T-shirts with his son, Ferenc, 7. About \$7,000 has been raised.

After 'Black Saturday,' Aussie strives to help

BY RICH PIETRAS
STAFF WRITER

Raging fires destroyed much of Frank Cseri's home, but the fact he's 10,000 miles away can't stop him from rebuilding.

Cseri (pronounced Seree) isn't much different from other New Hope residents — that is, until he opens his mouth. The 41-year-old father of twins left Victoria, Australia, 15 years ago and his trademark accent came with him to stay.

Another thing that has failed to fade is his fondness for the region and its people. So since "Black Saturday," when on Feb. 7 uncontrollable bushfires swept across southeastern Australia and killed 209 people, Cseri decided he would give the shirt off his back to help — or so to speak.

Australian bushfire relief T-shirts are available at:

- The Doylestown Tennis Center
- The Candlewyck Beef & Ale in Buckingham
- Skin n' Tonic Spa in Peddler's Village
- Siren Records in Doylestown

You can also get more info about buying shirts and Frank Cseri's efforts by calling 215-944-9200 ext. 101

"About a week after the fires, my friend, Karen Speer, saw how the news was affecting me and suggested selling T-shirts to aid the victims," Cseri said Wednesday from his Doylestown-based financial advising office. "Since then we raised about \$7,000 ... The support

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Relief

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we've received from Doylestown and the surrounding area has been phenomenal."

Although his parents, who live about 20 miles from the fires, and other family members were spared from the flames, the places Cseri enjoyed as a child, including Marysville and Kingslake, were incinerated.

"I used to go on school field trips to Kingslake," Cseri said of the region he likened to a built-out version of the Poconos. "There were platypus, koalas, peacocks and emus ... just nature all around. Now it's gone.

"It's hard to comprehend, but I read the devastation there is being compared to the fire-bombings in Dresden (Germany) during World War II."

And if learning over a million acres of his homeland were reduced to ashes wasn't hard enough, the cause of some of the fires became equally disturbing when two arsonists were charged with setting the fires in Marysville. Even after the flames were put out, Cseri heard residents weren't able to return home for more than a month because the town was declared a crime scene.

Other fires were caused, and subsequently fueled, by a "perfect fire storm" of near 120-degree heat and hurricane-like winds that knocked down power lines. Flames swept across countryside and through communities like trains on tracks and many people were not quick enough to escape.

Some of dead were discov-

ered in bath tubs, while others were found alive, some saving themselves by seeking sanctuary in swimming pools, basements or underground.

Described as "hell on Earth" by Victoria Premier John Brumby, about 595 fires, some five and six stories high, destroyed more than 1,800 homes in about 30 towns. Raging for more than two weeks, they required a monumental effort of more than 4,000 firefighters to get under control.

"My parents say people are still very upset and really just devastated," Cseri said. "Everyone is walking around in a state of disbelief."

So as the smoke has faded from the media coverage here, Cseri, who is also the founder of the Australian Society of Philadelphia, and Speer have busy selling shirts and telling anyone who will listen much still needs to be done Down Under.

"What I've found is that Americans and Australians are really closer in culture and thinking than you would believe," Cseri said. "The news may have been short-lived in America, but when I show images from my laptop computer of the destruction, people seem so shocked at what they see and want to help."

So one table at a time, Cseri, who has also incorporated his 7-year-old twins, a son, Ferenc, and a daughter, Alexandra, to the effort, is selling his shirts for \$15, the proceeds of which are going toward the Australian Red Cross Bushfire Appeal Fund.

And area businesses have been quick to provide a spot for him. Places like the

Maennerchor Club in Doylestown and the Doylestown and Ottsville fire companies have allowed the first-time fundraiser into their places of business.

Future sales are scheduled for the Moose Lodge in Doylestown tonight, the Doylestown K mart on April 18 and 19 and at the Masonic Lodge of Doylestown's annual pancake breakfast on Memorial Day. The persistent pitchman has even convinced area Outback Steakhouses to sell them.

Some star power has also been generated, as Australian natives Colin Hay, better known as the lead singer from Men at Work, and world-renowned guitarist Tommy Emmanuel, both supported Cseri's efforts at recent area shows.

And Wednesday, Speer learned The Little River Band, which is playing at Penn's Peak in Jim Thorpe on April 24, will not only sell Cseri's shirts, they will donate sales from their merchandising to the cause as well.

Dealing with the demands of running his own company, Cseri admits his fray into fundraising hasn't been easy.

"I wanted to sell about 1,000 shirts," Cseri says from his office, looking a bit bleary-eyed after a late night of pushing shirts and information at Hay's concert at Word Café Live in Philadelphia. "But now that it looks like I may need more, I think we'll try to go until May."

Or however long he feels like rebuilding ... shirt, by shirt, by shirt.

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