



27th March 2011

Letter to the Editor

The recent floods, bushfires and cyclone reinforced the importance of great relationships as neighbours worked side-by-side to defend homes, protect livelihoods and save lives.

Today is Neighbour Day, Australia's annual celebration of community. It began nine years ago when the body of an elderly Melbourne woman was discovered in her home by Victoria Police two years after she had passed away. Over that time local residents didn't make the connection between the piles of newspapers, store catalogues and mail piling up at her front door and something being amiss for an elderly, vulnerable woman living alone.

Since 2003 Australians in the city and the bush have got behind the day with no other incentive than a shared belief in safe, resilient and sustainable communities. Neighbours organise street parties, barbecues, morning teas and other social events to celebrate their community. Councils, shires and other bodies have backed them by holding major festivals, concerts and activities in local parks and other public spaces.

It doesn't cost anything to participate or register and the only limitation to how you celebrate is the imagination of you and your neighbours. Yet the legacy of the lonely death of an elderly woman continues to be closer relationships between neighbours all around Australia.

The message for Neighbour Day 2011 is a simple one - don't wait for an emergency or disaster to meet the people next door, across the street or on the next farm.

Andrew Heslop
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Australia Day Ambassador