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NEIGHBOURS COME TO RESCUE OF FIRE VICTIMS

by Wendy Burke

There's a lot to be said for community spirit and residents of Ifil Road, Flagstaff, St. Michael, reflected this yesterday when they came to the rescue of several fire victims.

Not only did these men and women come together to turn on hoses and soak the surrounding houses to prevent them catching on fire, but they also collected clothes, appliances and ensured that no-one was asleep in other houses at risk.

Damon Corrie, who lives in the neighbouring Highate Gardens, said he saw a big cloud of black smoke and jumped over his fence to help. "I was hoping it was something minor but it blazed up quickly. A group of guys and I entered the first house that started to burn, (and I kicked the door in) to see if anyone was in it - but the smoke was so thick (and the heat so intense) we couldn't go any further. (I heard a dog howling pitifully and wet my clothes with a garden hose before I ran and pulled-open the galvanize fence at back of the third house on-fire and squeezed inside There was a black dog in the yard and I freed it (it's chain was so hot it burned my fingers and the poor dog was lying motionless and whimpering, I thought it was nearly dead already, but I lifted it up and carried it out anyway; as soon as I reached through the fence the dog ran away as fast as his feet could carry him - so clearly he had some life left in him) said Corrie.

One elderly woman from the area, Isalene Braithwaite, said she had just finished cooking lunch, which she sends for some people a lot older than herself who couldn't help themselves, when she saw the smoke. "I thought it was coming for me and I took up Whitey (her dog) and got out. I carry him wherever I go. My house went flat before I knew what a problem it is when you've got nothing," she said, clutching her dog to her chest.

After firemen started to battle the blaze, one young man found a dog which was chained in the yard of one of the houses under threat. The Chihuahua's hair had been singed brown and some skin taken off its nose and ears.

The animal was trembling with fear but some young men gave it water to drink and kept watch for the owner.

Residents who were not at home and later arrived on the scene of the fire which started just after 12.30 pm, expressed gratitude that the furniture and gas bottles were removed to safety.