



Cartoon: Sean Doyle

Being powerless in modern times

EDITORIAL

By **ANGUS McGRATH, CAIN MUIR, JADE BLACKMORE and SEAN DOYLE**

MORE than eight weeks on from the super storm, much has returned to normal with little evidence of the damage caused and disruption to residents' lives, but discussion has arisen about the reliance of electricity in our modern society.

During the storm, the Congewai area lost power from a day and a half to an entire week affecting all residents of the Valley in many ways. School was closed for the whole week straight after the school students, teachers and the principal couldn't get to school because of flooding and power cuts.

For many of the school's students, this was a major event. They shared the following experiences with us:

"The toilet wouldn't flush because the pump didn't work. We filled buckets with rainwater and tipped them into the toilet," one student said.

"We filled up saucepans with water from the tanks and heated the water on the barbecue, the

fireplace and the gas stove. We filled the bath with the hot water to wash in," another said.

"We cooked on the gas stove and boiled water in pans to make a cup of tea for Dad."

"We wore head torches to see what we were doing when we washed up the dishes at night. We lit candles at night. We used torches as well. Our tablets and iPods were out of charge because we couldn't charge them. We used the car battery adapter to charge our devices."

"The fridge didn't work so when the power was off for a long time we needed to throw out the food. We gave it to the cats and dog. In the supermarkets there wasn't much on the shelves. We thought we might run out of things to eat. We ran out of bread, milk and drinks."

When the power is out and storms drop trees over power lines, many can't go to work, driving to work is dangerous because of the risk of an accident when driving on submerged roads and where traffic lights don't work correctly. Is this a good chance for our governments to commit more to alternative power sources? Should existing power lines be placed underground so lines don't come down, creating a major hazard and risk to life for many? We certainly think so.

The human face of the Hunter's storm

By **MRS WITTMANN, TALKING TO ANGUS McGRATH**

CONGEWAI Public School was one of the many schools which closed for the storm's duration, impacting many students, families and school staff. Teacher, Kathryn Wittmann, a Dungog resident who was dramatically affected, reflected on the super storm and how she and her family have coped.

"The water was chest-deep out the front and over two metres deep in our backyard and 50 centimetres deep inside our house. We rescued our elderly neighbours, wading through the water, then a few minutes later we had to escape from our own house when the water came in.

The carpets, cupboards, kitchen and bathroom, our furniture and whitegoods all needed to be thrown out. Everything in the garage (tools, etc.) and in my artist studio was ruined. My daughter lost everything including her bed, toys, clothes and shoes. All of my photos were lost or damaged and I lost many of my books. Our two cars were damaged beyond repair: one of them floated in the garage. My car floated in the driveway.

Our chickens were riding on their wooden perches which floated inside their henhouse, so they were very wet and worried but all survived. We took our little dog out of the house when we left - she had to sit on my husband's shoulder



Mrs Wittmann's street one hour after the water came through.

when he waded out of the house.

It happened too quickly for us to be frightened for ourselves. I was worried about my daughter, because her arm was broken and in a cast at the time so she couldn't swim, and the elderly people from next door because they couldn't help themselves. We were worried about other family members who might also have been in danger. We were in shock for a long time afterwards. I feel lucky that we weren't hurt

and proud that we did what we could to help other people. I am grateful to so many people who have helped us in so many ways, from doing our washing to loaning us a car, giving us clothes and food and helping clean out our house, and sharing their home with us while ours is repaired.

When something like this happens you really find out the value of community. We have been helped by strangers, friends and family beyond anything I could ever have expected."

Regional Art Gallery is moving forward

By **ANGUS McGRATH**

MAKING sure the arts remain a strong focus in Cessnock, volunteers and supporters are keeping Cessnock's Regional Art Gallery a vibrant hub of the arts, with the launch of the gallery's latest exhibition on June 4 a huge success.

Moving Forward, a pop-up showing of talented artists from the region, snared many viewers at the opening, with plans for more. Allowing usability of its ART SPACE has meant the

gallery is accessible for many more with schools and community groups able to participate in art lessons and activities in the gallery workshop in the near future.

Now entirely run by a volunteer band after funding was withdrawn by Cessnock City Council, the gallery is determined to remain a strong vibrant source of artistic representation in the Cessnock and surrounding area, supporting local artists and showcasing the many talents of the region.



Cessnock Regional Art Gallery volunteers.

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