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Communities help fire victims^{p2}

Kouga and Port Elizabeth people have gone out of their way to help those affected by the fires raging in Thornhill and Knyms and Plett.

There was a big crisis in Thornhill on 8 June when more than 200 people had to be evacuated to the Thornhill Community Hall due to raging fires in the area. The fire in the Longmore mountains was still burning in places today (9 June).

There are also fires on the Nelson Mandela Bay side of Kouga. The wind may turn, so Kouga officials are keeping a watchful eye on things there and fire fighters are out to check the areas that burn yesterday for possible flare-ups.

Thanks have been expressed by Kouga's Mayor, Elza van Linge, and councillors for the brave firefighters who have been battling the fire for the past 24 hours in gale force winds. They have been dubbed 'true warriors'.

According to Kouga Municipality damage is still being assessed. People affected by Longmore fire will be moved back to their homes today after having been evacuated yesterday.

A family of five was left homeless after the Orange Grove fire near Humansdorp, but have found temporary shelter and they will receive food, mattresses and blankets today.

Kouga Municipality says there has been amazing support from people and businesses all over, from the Kouga area and further afield. Thanks have been expressed to all those who opened their hearts, gave up their time for voluntary help or who donated in this time of need.

More donations are welcome to tide families over. More details are to be left at:

* St Francis: The St Francis Disaster Management Centre at the St Francis Bay Fire Station in St Francis Drive.

* Port Elizabeth: The office of Ruby Steenkamp Brokers at Metropark Office Park, 261 Cape Road, Newton Park.

* Jeffreys Bay: Kouga Municipality, 33 Da Gama Road.

* Humansdorp: Kouga Fire Department on the entry road from the N2 to Humansdorp.

Kouga Municipality has set up a special bank account for this purpose. Payments can be made electronically as well as at our cashiers. The bank details are as follows: FNB Jeffreys Bay, Cheque Account Nr 62 0 8 2 1 0 3 5 9 1. Reference DonationYourName

Having experienced a similar event in 2012, the St Francis Disaster Volunteer Group (DVG) also quickly co-ordinated relief efforts during these recent fires. This non-profit organisation sprang into action on 8 June 2017 and collected community donations in the form of blankets, pillows, clothes, towels and non-perishable food items.

By communicating with Kouga Municipality three areas affected by the fires in the Kouga region were quickly identified and donations were specifically dispatched: One to Orange Grove where four homes were burnt down; one load to Thornhill, and another to Longmore Forest firefighters.

The DVG also reacted fast when Karen Kirkman from Jeffreys Bay also requested blankets for firefighters in Longmore and Thornhill. Interlink Transport Port Elizabeth also collected half a truck load of donations from the DVG centre was dispatched to crises centres in Knyms.



Photo of fires raging out of control in Thornhill by Dirk Erasmus

The DVG thanks everyone who so generously contributed. (See more on DVG FB-page.)

The new municipal manager (see p10) was also on hand to help off-load mattresses at J-Bay municipal offices yesterday. Yesterday alone more than three tons had been received and delivered to Thornhill.

Kouga fire fighters also battled to extinguish fires in other areas and brought them under control. Other Veld and bush fires were extinguished along the N2 near Kruinfontein, Roodvlei near Humansdorp, the Humansdorp waste site and industrial areas, Bokkloof and the St Francis Golf Course.

A fire at Van Onselen's farm near the Oyster Bay road was brought under control. The veld fire that threatened farms between

Humansdorp and Oyster Bay earlier yesterday was contained in the flood area. Firefighters from both the N2 and R102 Vredenburg, Jeffreys Bay. Many people returned to their houses this morning to check on the safety of their property and possessions. There are still about 100 people at the Thornhill community hall. The fire at Orange Grove, that was threatening farms between Humansdorp and Oyster Bay, was also extinguished overnight.

No injuries have been reported

Residents from St Francis Bay also donated a big amount of groceries to those affected by the fires in Knyms and Plettenberg Bay. Duncan Brown, who received these donations to distribute to victims, was enormously impressed. (See his letter of thanks to the people of St Francis Bay for their generous donation to the fire victims on St Francis Chronicle's Page on FB.)

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