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Sunday Canberra Times

October 5, 2014 \$2.00

YOUNG GUNS

Canberra has a new generation of young volunteer firefighters ready to put their lives on the line during bushfire season, which began on Wednesday. Brendan van der Vlist, 30, Jane

Hurig, 33, and Andrew Lomas, 23, are pictured with Gungahlin rural fire brigade captain Simon Butt, 46.

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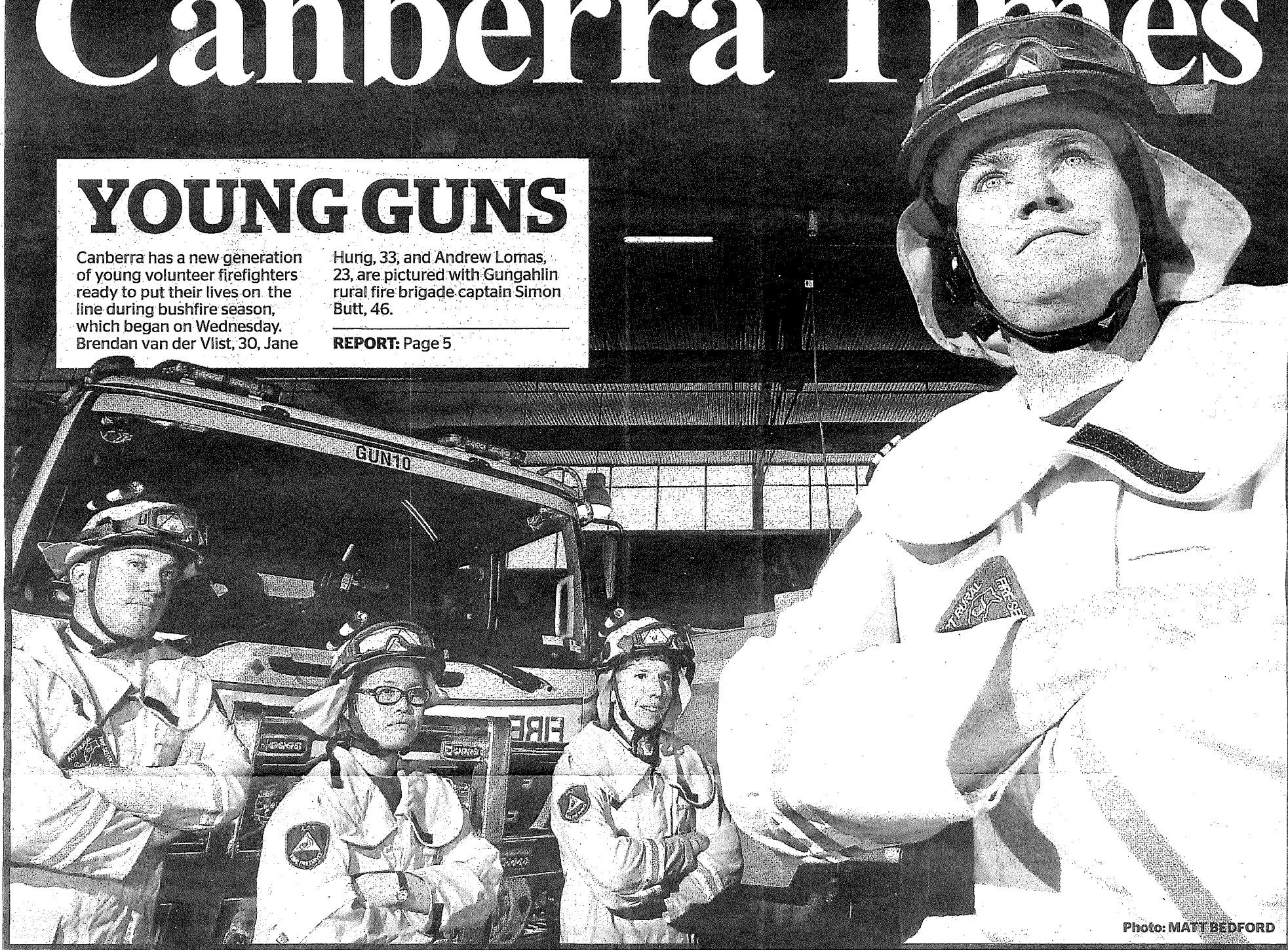


Photo: MATT BEDFORD

Revitalised ACT agency vows to bring animal abusers to justice

RSPCA TAKES ACTION

By JULIEANNE STRACHAN

The RSPCA has vowed to crack down on some of Canberra's worst animal abusers by dragging them before the courts in a renewed push to bring offenders to justice.

RSPCA ACT chief executive Tammy Ven Dange said the number of animal cruelty complaints investigated in Canberra had jumped substantially in the past financial year.

"We have a number of court cases

at the moment because we have had a massive backlog of inspector work," she said.

"We are putting a lot of things before the court."

She said RSPCA inspectors had investigated 668 complaints of cruelty in Canberra during the 2012-13 financial year, which rose to 1061 cases in 2013-14.

Ms Ven Dange expects the figures to increase again this financial year.

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NEWS

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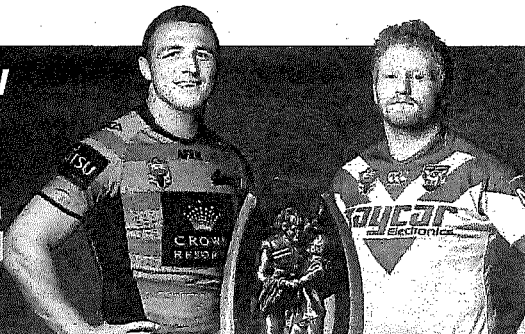
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NRL GRAND FINAL PREVIEW

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

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Fired up to protect ACT

By MATTHEW RAGGATT

Generation Y will soon make up the majority of ACT's rural firefighters, as a surge of recruits in recent years has changed brigade dynamics.

The number of volunteers has increased by more than one-third in three years to leave the median age at 36, a stark contrast to the NSW rural service's figure of 51.

Gungahlin Rural Fire Brigade captain Simon Butt said there had been positive results from the influx of people in their 20s to the team during the past five years.

"It's the expectations that they be treated with respect, that their time is valued - it's required us to improve our training, improve our communications," he said.

"Without a doubt it has brought some of our older members into the digital age."

The captain said age differences were most noticeable when his Gungahlin brigade travelled interstate.

Nearly half - 48 per cent - of the ACT's rural firefighters were 34 or younger.

While those 45 or older make up 61 per cent of NSW's rural volunteers, the equivalent elder tier in the ACT make up only 29 per cent.

ACT Rural Fire Service chief officer Andrew Stark said in addition to the favourable demographics of workers moving to Canberra for Defence and other Commonwealth jobs, the small jurisdiction allowed the service to be more adaptable to members' needs.

He said better online information about the fighting of fires was also a likely factor in encouraging new volunteers.

"People can see the value of their volunteering, back to friends or family or back to the community," Mr Stark said.

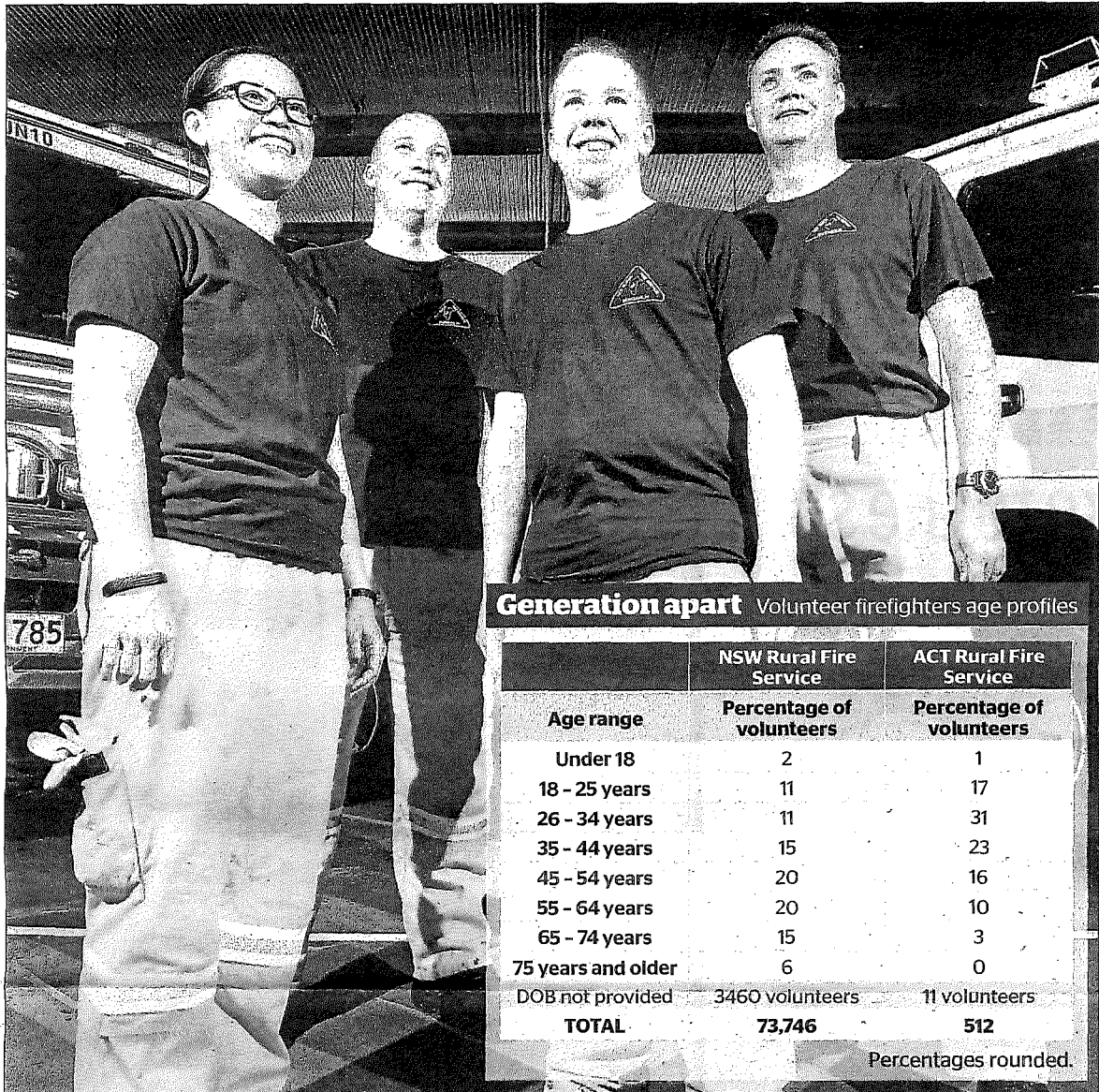
The generation shift has in part spilt across the border.

Wallaroo Rural Fire Brigade is also home to a majority under-40 crowd.

Brigade captain Neil Shepherd estimated the average age of the volunteers he led was now 30 to 33, with about 20 of his brigade of 92 aged under 25.

"Of those 20 or so there are only a handful who live locally, the rest are out of the northern suburbs of Canberra," he said.

"For our 50 years-plus type members, they are very quick to respond to an incident; they're very available because they're predominantly retired," Captain Shepherd said.



Canberra's new generation of firefighters, from left, Jane Hung, 33, Brendan van der Vlist, 30, and Andrew Lomas, 23, with Gungahlin rural fire brigade captain Simon Butt. Photo: MATT BEDFORD

Generation apart Volunteer firefighters age profiles

Age range	NSW Rural Fire Service Percentage of volunteers	ACT Rural Fire Service Percentage of volunteers
Under 18	2	1
18 - 25 years	11	17
26 - 34 years	11	31
35 - 44 years	15	23
45 - 54 years	20	16
55 - 64 years	20	10
65 - 74 years	15	3
75 years and older	6	0
DOB not provided	3460 volunteers	11 volunteers
TOTAL	73,746	512

Percentages rounded.

"Then the younger guys can come and replace them [at an incident] and do longer work as they're fitter."

Demographics can shift greatly across short distances, as the Wamboin Rural Fire Brigade over the ACT's north-east border has an average age of 57.

Brigade captain Geoff Foster said younger members would be welcomed, with leadership succession an issue.

Murrumbateman brigade captain Matt Baker said his team was largely 40 and older, with only a handful of under-25s, but the majority of members had arrived within the past five years.

The ACT's rural fire service now has 512 volunteers, down from 550 last year but up from 374 in 2010-11.

New Gungahlin recruit, 33-year-old engineer Jane Hung, said volunteering was a great way to make connections and starting young had its benefits.

"As someone without a family or kids here, you've got more time to contribute," she said.

Age breakdowns were not available for the 1100 members of the ACT's community fire units, a home-defence network administered by the urban ACT Fire & Rescue.

The Bureau of Meteorology has

forecast a higher than average bushfire risk for southern Australia this summer.

Emergency Services Minister Simon Corbell warned this week there was already a risk of fire.

Mr Stark said environmental conditions were set to be difficult.

"The bureau has forecast above average temperatures from now to Christmas, and below average rainfall, and that will mean as we move closer to Christmas the conditions will deteriorate quite rapidly."

EDITORIAL: Page 16

Residents risk lives by waiting for smoke

Research released on the eve of this month's anniversary of the Blue Mountains bushfires, which damaged more than 200 properties last year, reveals that residents affected by three fires in NSW tended to delay their decision to stay or leave until the fire actually threatened them and they could see signs such as smoke.

Very few people left early on the basis of extreme weather forecasts, according to the survey carried out by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre on behalf of the Rural Fire Service.

The survey states: "The majority of people interviewed had an informal plan for bushfire, but did not write their plan down. Some people indicated that they had obtained the local NSW RFS survival plan kit, but only a relatively small number used the guide."

It also found that while social media was not considered a key source for raising awareness of bushfire threat, some residents relied on it for updates after becoming aware of the threat.

Some 775 affected NSW residents responded to the survey, providing insights of their experiences of the bushfires in the Blue Mountains, Port Stephens and the southern highlands. One-third of Blue Mountains residents interviewed indicated that they intended to stay and defend their properties, about twice that indicated in the other two areas.

Author Jim McLennan, adjunct professor at La Trobe University's school of psychological science, said: "Notably, only 1 per cent of those interviewed chose to leave solely on the basis of fire danger weather predictions. This substantiates previous studies which consistently show that people mostly wait to react to a bushfire event, rather than taking proactive action."

Of those at home when the bushfire threatened, 46 per cent stayed to defend their properties. For those who decided to leave, the trigger was seeing the smoke, followed by emergency alert messages (15 per cent) and sight of flames or advice from police or firefighters (13 per cent).

Eighty-nine per cent of interviewees indicated that they were fully insured.

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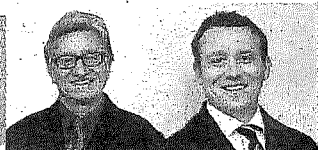
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