

## **The Spirit of Ubuntu**

Once in a while an event comes along which impacts a whole community. The residents of the Cape Town Southern Peninsula were all affected by the recent raging veld fires which ravaged our fauna and flora during a week-long inferno that proved very difficult to quench. Fire fighters and the community fought shoulder to shoulder in a battle which sometimes seemed to threaten our very existence, as flames threatened our natural habitat, our infrastructure and even our homes.

In the aftermath thousands of acres of veld were reduced to ashes, several homes were destroyed, injuries were sustained but, worst of all; a seasoned pilot lost his life when he had to execute an emergency landing at Cape Point. The fires took a terrible toll.

The fires started over the weekend at the beginning of March, seemingly at different points. By Sunday evening the sky above the Southern mountains was aglow. Monday morning saw all three routes over the mountain closed with Chapman's Peak, Ou Kaapse Weg and Boyes drive affected and access to town virtually impossible. It was on my drive to work that I became aware of the seriousness of the situation as I approached Ou Kaapse Weg from the South. The extent of the blaze was obvious, stretching across the mountain range from Chapmans Peak to Clovelly and Fish Hoek. Motorists were being turned away from the access routes across the mountain, sheepishly driving back home or stopping by the roadside to stare at the conflagration.

The community soon mobilised. In this all-encompassing emergency residents banded together in a spontaneous show of solidarity. Social media groups very quickly turned into fire information groups and before long help was being offered and organised. Community members set up an operations centre in a local church hall under the direction of the school headmaster and the volunteer wildfire services. From here community support to the fire fighters was coordinated. Needs were communicated via social media and volunteers came forward offering up their time and money.

The local tow truck operator suddenly became the emergency delivery man, running donated supplies to the various collection points. The local grocers became instant charities, supplying food and water for free or at no profit. Hundreds of moms, dads and school kids got involved. Clergymen and small business owners pooled efforts while radio stations and big business raised funds.

There were many anxious moments as the fires came perilously close to suburbs, a few of which had to be evacuated. One does not normally think of the logistics involved or the myriad of different needs. Horses had to be moved to safety, for which experienced handlers were needed. All sorts of wildlife had to flee and home owners close to the fires put bowls of water in their gardens for the critters to slake their thirst.

The needs of the firemen were also pretty specific with a requirement for Ice, water and food, specifically small packets of pocket size like energy bars, packets of nuts and dried fruit and anything healthy that could deliver a good energy boost. An amazing aspect of the efforts is that the operations

room had to stop the flow of donations at intervals due to an oversupply! At our local drop off point I was inspired by the diversity of individuals working side by side. Race, religion and ideology disappeared while everyone focused on the task at hand.

The fire serves as a reminder to us of the value of people. The material is transient. Everything we own can be taken away but through effort can also be replaced. While the material can provide us with physical comfort and a sense of wellbeing it can never equal the pleasure of good company and the love and affection of others.

We function as a society and at the heart of it everything we do is somehow connected to other people. Some of us are lucky enough to work in a field where we can directly see the positive impact of our work on others. The home loans space is closely contested and gaining and maintaining market share requires focus and commitment. As a direct home loan provider SA Home Loans does not benefit from contracted business and we do not receive business from lead providers at a fee. Our business is sourced by directly engaging with the client, sometimes via estate agents but mostly through referrals and prospecting. This means that we have to work a little bit harder for our business. We have to ensure that we engage other in a meaningful way. While it would be a gross exaggeration to compare my Team and what we do with the massive efforts of the community during the disaster, I could not help but be reminded of the importance of a common purpose and the value of a good Team effort.

At SA Home Loans it is our goal to make dreams come true by providing the finance for a home. We have done so very successfully for many years and, with the dedicated Team we have and the referrals from our happy clients, we will be doing so for many more years to come. As I have realised again during the amazing efforts of the community I am part of: At the end of the day it matters not what we have. It matters who we have.