

McCARTHY BELLES

Statement

HON MIA DAVIES (Agricultural) [9.45 pm]: I rise tonight to talk about an event that I attended in York this morning. Members will know that York and Northam bore the brunt of the storms that ripped through the Mid West and the Wheatbelt earlier this month. Although the storms stretched from Geraldton right down to Narrogin, I think York might have been ground zero. Hon Max Trenorden and I visited Jennacubbine, Northam, York and Beverley on the Tuesday after the storms to survey some of the damage and to meet with the shire and members of the public. I returned on the Thursday afterwards to attend the first town hall meeting, when everyone in the town came together to get an update on where things were at. These storms were a serious event. People relayed to me stories of snatching their kids out of the pool, just managing to get their houses shut up before the storm hit and barricading themselves in their bathrooms as it passed. There was not a lot of notice and the towns that were lucky enough to be on the periphery of the storm suffered what we in the Wheatbelt love—a good dust storm, which gets into every nook and cranny of a person's house. Roofs in York, Northam and surrounds were peeled off and there was what looked like tin foil in paddocks. Massive trees were wrenched out of the ground. There are now 11 houses in York that are no longer habitable. It is a credit to the community that these families and individuals have been absorbed into that community while they either rebuild or make repairs. Although Western Power worked incredibly hard, because it was basically one unit from Western Power that covered from Geraldton down to Narrogin, there were volunteers from everywhere. There was a lack of power in the town and surrounds for some time. It was pretty hot out there. I stopped at The Lakes on the way back from York this morning and it was probably about 40 degrees out there. There was a lady there from York who had lost her roof. She still had only a tarpaulin over her property because they had not been able to repair it yet. It must be pretty uncomfortable in some of those houses. Even though the media has moved on to report other tragedies, and there have been a few serious events in Western Australia and Australia over the Christmas period, some families in the Wheatbelt are still doing it tough.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the community leapt into action. A one-stop shop was set up in the recreation centre, with representatives from the Department for Child Protection and other key agencies that were responsible for coordinating emergency responses. The shire, which is ably led by Shire President Pat Hooper and his team of councillors, and Ray Hooper, the CEO, has been working extremely hard for the community and continues to do so. In addition, there were a number of not-for-profit and volunteer organisations, as there always are. The Australian Red Cross and the Country Women's Association of WA were on hand to provide counselling and to cook meals for volunteers and anyone who had lost the contents of their fridge and freezer, of which there were many. They also supported the volunteer and State Emergency Service workers who operated from the town.

That brings me to the event that I attended today. One of the volunteer groups that worked to support the community through this difficult time was the York branch of the Country Women's Association. For those who are not familiar with the CWA, it is a non-political and non-sectarian organisation with the stated aim of improving the wellbeing of all people, especially those in country areas, by promoting courtesy, cooperation, community effort, ethical standards and the wise use of resources. It began in WA in 1924. The first branch was in Nungarin, another town in my electorate, and has been an integral part of rural and regional life ever since then. I declare an interest—I am a member. The association has a new membership type, which is called associate member, to which less onerous duties are attached. With my schedule I cannot attend its monthly meetings —

Hon Liz Behjat: Do you have to bake scones?

Hon MIA DAVIES: I do not have to bake scones, but I was lucky enough to be taught how to bake scones by my mum and my grandma, so I could probably bake them if I had to.

Hon Ken Travers: Is there a secret Davies family recipe?

Hon MIA DAVIES: That would be telling! I joined the CWA last year after I had been to another event in York and met some of the lovely members out there. They seem to have adopted me, even though I am not attached to any of the branches in particular. My grandmother was a member of the Wyalkatchem branch. For her generation, membership was not a decision; the women joined as a matter of course. The CWA was formed to meet the needs of the time. In 1924 a woman in a rural community was isolated, and it provided a voice to government and helped families seek solutions for some of the difficulties they faced in farming areas and the like. They continue to make a valid and valued contribution to the community through the activities they run and their fundraising and in providing support to some of the most vulnerable parts of our community.

Today was a special day. It was the inaugural meeting of the McCarthy Belles. The Belles' branches of the CWA are groups for younger women who want to learn new skills, and make a difference to their community while

having fun, making friends and providing a link to the history of the CWA and everything it stands for. The McCarthy Belles are so named after Lawrence Dominic McCarthy, who was born in York in 1892. Lawrence McCarthy joined the Australian Imperial Force in 1914 and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry in the face of enemy action during World War I. I will read a little bit of history about Lawrence McCarthy. Our ninety-eighth VC holder, Special Air Service Corporal Ben Roberts-Smith, was announced during the parliamentary recess. It is worth reflecting on some of the contributions these very wonderful and brave men made. I will read from Wikipedia as follows —

On 23 August 1918, McCarthy performed what some regarded as the most effective piece of individual fighting in the history of the AIF next to Albert Jacka's Military Cross winning feat at —

I am going to mash that name —

Pozières.

That was a good try. It continues —

Near Madam Wood, east of —

I have got myself into a right pickle now! —

Vermandovillers, France, the battalion was heavily opposed by well-posted machine-guns. Lieutenant McCarthy, realizing the situation, dashed across the open ground with two men to the nearest post, where, having out-distanced his companions, he put the gun out of action, then continued fighting his way down the trench. Later, having been joined by one of his men, together they bombed their way along the trench until contact was established with an adjoining unit. During this action Lieutenant McCarthy had killed 22 of the enemy, taken 50 prisoners and captured 5 machine-guns.

For this McCarthy was awarded the Victoria Cross that, within his battalion and in some quarters of the London press, came to be known as the “super-VC”.

These ladies have chosen to name their chapter of the CWA after Lawrence McCarthy. They are now known as the McCarthy Belles. Fifteen new members were officially welcomed today into the CWA organisation by state president, Mrs Maggie Donaldson. I would like to congratulate the office bearers who were elected: Gill Mount Bryson, President, who has been instrumental in pulling the group together; Sam Ogley, Secretary; Catherine Beattie, Treasurer; and Rachel Martin, Vice President. I would also like to congratulate the other women who will support these office bearers as the new branch starts to undertake projects and work in their community. It is a big step and a wonderful one to make as part of a small community. When chatting to them today I learnt that they joined for a number of reasons, and it was not for the sewing and the cooking, although I think some of them wanted a few tips about how to win some of the prizes at the York Agricultural Show. There is a contingent of families living in York who have fly in, fly out partners. Some are looking for some companionship; some do not have family close by and have young children so they are looking to meet other mums and I suppose get some assistance and respite; and some want to contribute back to the community through voluntary work. There was a raft of reasons these ladies want to be part of this group. Mrs Janet Taber, the president of the CWA York branch—which is the senior branch out there—has welcomed the new branch and the renewed interest in the CWA in the town. They have provided mentoring to these new ladies and advice to them in assisting them to get the branch started. They were absolutely overjoyed to see some new members in the CWA House on Avon Terrace today. I am sure there will be many opportunities for them to experience the history of the organisation but bring their own flavour to it. At a time when it is really difficult to get people to join organisations and to volunteer, they have done an outstanding job. I wish them all the best.