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## Lafayette native helps in Australia firefight

By Jennifer Wake



Forestry staffer Martha Morse with a ringtail possum she and her crew saved at the North Black Range Palerang Fire. Photos provided

The devastated area is over 80 times larger than the total area burned in the California wildfires, according to an NBC News report.

Morse has been fighting seasonal wildfires with contract crews based out of Oregon for the past two years. "She typically works at a ski resort in winter, fights fires and raft guides in the summer," her father said. This month, the crew was averaging 12-16 hour shifts, working about six days straight before having a day off.

Martha has been impressed with the volunteer firefighters in Australia, saying how incredible it has been to see people actively saving homes in their community. One of her crew members commented in a recent news article how Australia's situation would be completely different without the rural volunteer firefighting group.

As for his daughter's safety, Mike Morse says her crew and company take safety very seriously and she is learning a lot. "I'm happy that she has found a job that challenges her and fits her outdoor lifestyle and orientation." He keeps in touch with his daughter through

WhatsApp, getting photos and texts.

While wet weather helped some of the fires dissipate, it caused other issues such as flooding and landslides. And, unfortunately, it wasn't enough to extinguish all of the flames. As of Jan. 16 more than 80 fires continued to burn, with 30 yet to be contained.

With bushfires continuing to rage across the country, Australia is not a destination most Americans are choosing in their travel plans. Unless, of course, you're a firefighter.

Lafayette resident Mike Morse has been in touch almost daily with his daughter, Martha, since she left Oct. 26 to help battle the Australian blazes as part of a private firefighting company crew on a six-month contract. With only two U.S. fire seasons under her belt, the 21-year-old firefighter, who attended Springhill Elementary, Acalanes High School and Tilden Prep, and played LMYA soccer and basketball with St. Perpetua CYO, says she's never experienced anything like this. "The fires we are witnessing today in Australia are like no other," Morse wrote in a Jan. 10 Australian newspaper article. "The impact alone is devastating."

The Australia fires, which began in September, are responsible for killing at least 24 people, millions of wildlife, and destroying over 2,000 homes in the 32,000 square miles that have burned since the blazes began.





Reach the reporter at: [jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com)

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