

Members give up their holidays for others

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NSW's inordinate need for the skills of Rural Fire Service volunteers this summer had some teachers working extremely hard for strangers during the vacation period.

"From the 19th of December to day one of the school year I had four days off and in the first two weeks of school I only got to the school three or four times," said Federation member and captain of the Candelo brigade of the Rural Fire Service Philip Banks.

"I was on the truck in some capacity on all those days." He not only fought fires on the far South Coast but was involved in the logistics of deploying crews.

The Bega High School teacher said he had to manage fatigue while trying to get back into the day-to-day routine of school.

This year marks Philip's 30th year in the brigade. He said he continues to volunteer because there's a continual need: "The fire season goes almost 12 months of the year.

"While ever there is a need and I am physically able, I will help out."

Another Federation member and some Bega High students also volunteer in the Candelo brigade.

Federation member Stephen Chomicz fought fires and led crews to assist with property protection and evacuations in his local area (Macarthur), Tumut, Batlow, Bargo, the Oaks, Wingello and Bundanoon.

"It's been a horrific summer and the loss of property and life would have been far greater without Rural Fire Service volunteers," Stephen, the deputy captain of Minto Heights Rural Fire Service and a teacher at St Andrews Public School, said.

"Volunteering for the Rural Fire Service is a wonderful way to give back to the community.

"The rewards are phenomenal, knowing if it wasn't for you and the team there would be some people who wouldn't still have their houses, and animals their lives."

Kerri Carr is a staff writer

