

Alex appeals to global village for compassion

SHARON GREEN

KENYAN Alex Lengarite knows what it feels like to be starving as he waits for his next meal.

Sometimes he would go days without food and water.

This is why he has travelled all the way from northern Kenya to Geelong to promote the awareness of the food crisis in developing countries.

Yesterday he spoke at the Global Leadership Convention where he told his story to local secondary students.

Alex spent his youth attending to his family cattle and now works for World Vision Kenya to ensure that local communities are working to reduce poverty.

"We want Australians to become more aware so we can get help," Alex said.

Food prices have more than doubled in countries such as Kenya, which means the local community has less food resources readily available.

"People in my village have no idea about the economic crisis. They just think the food prices go up for no reason," Alex said.

Jesse Poulton witnessed the direct effects of poverty when he embarked on a trip to Cambodia earlier this year.

He is the Victorian Youth Ambassador and juggling World Vision commitments as he completes year 12 studies.

"Travelling overseas really opened my eyes to poverty issues and food distribution. You see it first-hand and you see it raw," he said.

Jesse's most confronting experience while travelling through Cambodia was when he spent a day with a poor family.

"The little boy in the family turned around to me and said 'Can you get your people to help me?' These people really are desperate for our help," he said.

Jesse said that the easiest way to contribute to those less fortunate was to simply get involved.

"Do the 40 Hour Famine or see how you can get involved with a non-for-profit organisation like World Vision," he said.

He hoped students who attended the convention would contribute to the community.

"I've always been passionate about preventing poverty and even the smallest things that we do can help in significant ways," Jesse said.



AMBASSADOR: Alex Lengarite is in Geelong appealing for help to ease the plight of poverty-stricken Kenya.



The Pole House at Fairhaven

Landmark makeover

THE Pole House on the Great Ocean Road at Fairhaven has a whole lot more poles surrounding it at the moment.

The unique design and location of the house presents quite a challenge when a fresh coat of paint is required.

For the next six weeks the Pole House will be covered in scaffolding as it undergoes maintenance.

Owners Kathi and Ray Adams say the project has provided an interesting period of reflection.

"We are fortunate to have so much of this iconic building's history documented, with fascinating images of the construction period," Ms Adams said.

It was the vision of engineer and architect Frank Dixon more than 30 years ago and served as a weekender for the Dixon family, until its sale in 2006.

The house was used in the filming of *Mad Max* as Max's house in 1979. Today the property is available as a holiday rental.

Sun sets on rebate

TONY PRYZ

GEELONG alternative energy companies had a last-minute rush on Tuesday as the Federal Government announced the \$8000 solar panel rebate was to end.

Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett axed the scheme three weeks early because of its unexpected popularity.

The Government has 65,000 applications waiting to be processed and the cost of the scheme has blown out from \$120 million to \$750 million a year. Some 30,000 applications have been received in the past month.

Kerrin Black, director of Geelong solar energy system installer Gee-Tek Pty Ltd, said the scheme had been extremely popular in Geelong.

"We have done about 100 installations and still have about 40 on the books," he said.

That number was added to when another half-dozen people called in to pick up



Peter Garrett

application forms on Tuesday afternoon after they heard the rebate was to end.

Applications in the post by close of business Tuesday are still eligible.

Australian Conservation Foundation's Greenhome program manager, Sarah Johnson, said it was unfortunate the program had ended ahead of time but the popularity of the scheme was undeniable.

Ms Johnson has been running

workshops in Colac and Geelong to explain the benefits of solar energy to householders.

"We have one in Geelong tonight and will be running them each Wednesday night on June at the Mercure (Hotel)," she said.

"We have found people in the Geelong and Colac regions to be very interested in the benefits of solar energy and are keen to learn more about it.

"So even though the rebate is not there, we are still going to run the workshops."

A new 'solar credits' system has replaced the rebate scheme.

Mr Black said the rebate had been good for business but he was confident the interest in solar power would remain.

He said businesses, which did not have access to the rebate, would be able to get the benefit of the new solar credits scheme.

The solar hot water rebate scheme for the replacement of electric hot water systems is still operating.

Geelong couple fired up by solar debacle

PETER FARAGO

A GEELONG couple will turn their back on solar energy if they miss out on an \$8000 rebate after Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett abruptly axed it on Tuesday.

Jenny Czajka said she borrowed \$2700 on her mortgage to pay the deposit on a Clear Solar energy system but was shocked to learn she had until midnight Tuesday, not June 30, to submit paperwork for the rebate.

Ms Czajka said she expressed her application on Tuesday but was uncertain whether it would be considered for the \$8000 rebate.

"We did the right thing. We paid up-front, we even agreed to have a sign in our front yard advertising it," she said

"We're devastated. We've been paying interest on that for at least three weeks."

Ms Czajka joined a rush to order solar panels, taking advantage of the rebate making the technology affordable.

"Now, everybody is bombarding them trying to get their money back," she said.

"We struggled to pay that little bit extra off the mortgage. We never touched it before but we're speaking about the future of our children here."

But Ms Czajka said she couldn't afford the solar panels without the rebate.

"We're going to have to miss out entirely. It's a big disappointment," she said. "Even if we're lucky enough to get ours, I still won't feel better about it."