

Istead retiring after 30 years of fighting fires

By Tom Gavey
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Wally Istead says he's always had a burning desire to warn people about the danger of fire.

At the end of this month the Belleville Fire Department's senior fire prevention officer will retire after more than 30 years with the service.

"I guess I always liked fire trucks as a kid and then when I got older I started to get interested in fire safety," says Istead.

He joined the service April 1, 1967 and had only been on the job about a year when one of the most significant fires of his career occurred.

"It was the Booth's fire on Front Street in 1968. It had to be 40-below, I mean it was really cold. The magnitude sticks out in my mind," says Istead, 60.

He became a fire prevention officer in 1989 and took over as head of the department in early 1996 when Reg Christopher retired.

Istead marvels at the new equipment available to firefighters now compared to when he

began.

"It almost makes me want to start all over again as a firefighter," he says.

"As a fire prevention officer the kids look up to you and I really enjoyed going into the schools."

His chief disappointment as he retires, Istead says, is that the city never enacted a bylaw requiring smoke detectors in all homes.

"They're required in new homes and if you're retrofitting rental units. I would have liked to see them required in every home," he sighs.

As a parting reminder Istead says he urges every family to have an escape plan and practice it with their children. Married to Pat, with two sons and three grand-

children, Istead says there's plenty of work to do around the house during his retirement.

"If somebody needs a hand I'm always around," he says. There will be competition within the fire department to name a replacement for Istead. The bureau has one senior fire prevention officer and two subordinates.



Wally Istead

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