

Jennifer Greenly joins the Trent Hills fire department

Now the 21-year-old Kemptville College graduate is "pretty excited" about going out on her first call, "but I'm sure when it happens, it might scare me a little bit," she added.

Ms. Greenly lives at home with her parents, Jim and Mary Greenly -- who are "pretty proud of me" -- and helps out on the family's Warkworth-area farm, a cash crop and cow-calf operation that recently expanded to include sheep.

The work keeps her fit, as has playing defence in hockey for the past decade.

"I think we made obviously a good choice here," said Fire Chief Tim Blake.

He also admitted to being excited by Ms. Greenly "breaking new ground" as it furthers his department's commitment to reach out to young people in the community to keep its ranks full.

Trent Hills has never had a female firefighter since its birth in 2001 and as far as he knows, neither had the local fire departments -- Campbellford-Seymour, Hastings and Warkworth -- before the municipalities amalgamated.

"Why we never have, I can't answer the question,

I don't know why," said Chief Blake, who started out as a volunteer firefighter 25 years ago, before being named Trent Hills' full-time chief last year.

He said Ms. Greenly shouldn't have a problem making the transition to volunteer firefighter, despite being the only woman in an all-male department.

"Her fitting into Station 1400 is going to be quite easy," Chief Blake said. "The guys over there know her ... It's a family."

Ms. Greenly and two other new recruits who were part of the department's new cadet program will be sent on courses as well as receive instruction at the local level each month as part of their training.

"She will be expected to perform the same duties as the men," Chief Blake said.

Firefighters respond to much more than structure fires and vehicle collisions. About half of their calls are for medical reasons, he said.

Ms. Greenly likely won't have to serve long as the lone woman in the local fire department. Another woman, who also interviewed for the position, is now on the waiting list for an open spot, and a third woman is currently enrolled in the cadet program.

Women firefighters as capable as male colleagues

TRENT HILLS -- According to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, there are 11,035 full-time firefighters and 19,214 volunteer firefighters in Ontario, but how many are female isn't known.

The numbers aren't broken down by gender, said Carolyn Chambers, president of Fire Service Women Ontario (FSWO), but research done in the United States estimated that about three per cent of that country's firefighters are women.

FSWO has about 100 members, but "we know there are a lot more" out there who could join, she said.

When Ms. Chambers, who's now employed in the Fire Marshal's Office of Ontario, started out more than 30 years ago, "it was very difficult" for a woman to join the fire service. Departments wouldn't even accept an application, but "we've come a long way, baby, from those days," she said.

"We have women now in firefighting in Ontario who are reaching the senior ranks," including captains and fire chiefs.

One is poised to become the next president of the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario.

Its current president, John Scheeringa, said female recruitment is "happening big time" these days.

"Two-thirds of the stations out there now have ladies on the trucks," he said, referring to the province's 251 volunteer fire departments.

Mr. Scheeringa said having women join a fire service "is a very positive thing" because they can work equally as well as men "and there are some roles (where) they can actually achieve better results," such as calming children or dealing sen-

sitively with women in stress.

And they're just as capable of handling the physical demands of the job.

"They can do it every bit as well as us," he said.

"Half the battle in firefighting is ... keeping your head on your shoulder," Mr. Scheeringa said. "Everything else you can train and build for."

Fire Service Women Ontario was formed two years ago to "educate, empower, encourage" young women to become firefighters.

The organization works with colleges that offer programs that groom firefighters, "to help cultivate" the acceptance of females in what has been traditionally a male role, and "we're starting to see more interest by young women," Ms. Chambers said.

Being a firefighter is "not all about strength," she said. Equally important are agility, communication skills, problem-solving, compassion, teamwork and being able to work under pressure -- skills that are not reserved for men alone, she said.

But not many women over the years have chosen to become a professional or volunteer firefighter because society in general "may not have looked as broadly" as it could have "at all the qualified and capable and talented people in the community," she said. "We always have those stereotypes to overcome."

"Sometimes the first one through the door has it tough because it's new and different. It's all about integration and respect."

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