

## Frontenac's Portland District

By Julie Druker

THE FRONTENAC NEWS

On June 7 from 11:00am-3:00pm, South Frontenac Fire and Rescue will be having an Open House celebrating 50 years of fire fighting in the Portland District. The celebrations will take place at Station 4, the original hall where it all began, located on Holleford Road in Hartington. The celebrations will include a free barbeque plus various displays comparing old and new fire fighting equipment.

Ben Lappen, assistant deputy chief at Stations 3 & 4 has spent 22 years on the department. He has access to historical documents that describe the beginning of the department here. It all began in 1958, when 40 concerned Portland Township residents saw the need to form their own group of fire fighters. Before this time, the residents relied on the services of the Kingston and Loughborough departments, which were costly, and due to long distances and poor road conditions they often could not respond quickly enough.

That year funds were gathered, equipment was purchased, including an original pumper that had to be stored at Leonard Fuels until the original hall was built, and the first 21-member volunteer fire department was incorporated by council in May of 1958.

Bill Babcock, deputy chief at Stations 3 and 4, has served for 38 years. He explains that, "fifty years ago it was very different from now .... back then mostly all of the calls were fire related. Today 90% of the calls we receive are medical calls." He explains that 50 years ago funerals homes in the district had their own ambulances that responded to medical emergencies.

The numbers of volunteers has changed dramatically over the years as well. Ben says that, "Fifty years ago and up until the 1970s shift workers employed at Alcan, DuPont and other factories in the area made up a huge percentage of the volunteers." The number of volunteers has taken a large hit with the downsizing of those companies. Ben adds, "While some volun-

### *Ben Lappen and Bill Babcock*

teers have permission to leave their day jobs to respond to a call, the number of volunteers available during the day these days is far less than it once was."

Training has changed dramatically over the years as well. Bill explains, "Up until about 10 years ago volunteers could put in a single session of training at the station, were handed a pager and were considered ready to go out." Today a mandatory 19-component training course put out by the Ontario Fire Curriculum is required before anyone steps out to fight a fire or perform a rescue.

A similar change includes regular debriefing sessions which occur after any call where there has been serious injury or loss of life. Regular training sessions are also held every Tuesday night at Station 4.

Volunteer fire fighting is a serious undertaking, and there is definitely something about it that keeps these two veterans coming back. Deputy Chief Bill, a cattle farmer (late to arrive for an interview due to assisting a "cast" animal) explains that he "knew he could do good serving on the department by helping people when they are really in desperate need of it."

Are there challenges? "Of course. Any call that involves a youngster is always difficult," he says. Assistant Deputy Ben adds... "Lots of times we are responding to friends and family in the community." That must indeed be a challenge in itself but also an incredible reward.

As our meeting is forced to end due the training session that lies ahead, Deputy Chief Bill is handed an envelope that arrived for him that evening, dropped off by a member of the community whose child received the assistance of the department earlier that week. A note of thanks, one of many.

Both Bill and Ben are looking forward to the upcoming open house. Anyone interested in the history of fire fighting in the District of Portland shouldn't miss this event. These two gentlemen have 50 combined years of service between them; there will definitely be a wealth of information and history to those seeking it out.

And if the machines will interest you as much as these men; and the trucks will attract you as much as their talk...even more reason to attend the Open House. All of the "the goods" will be on display at Station 4 on June 7.

Modern medical equipment including defibrillators, resuscitation bags and back boarding equipment will be shown. On display also will be newer tools used for water and ice rescues. On hand will be "bush pumps" a modern type of pump that can pump water up to 3 miles into the bush.

And of course..... the trucks: The 4WD bush truck used for towing trailers and getting into those hard to reach places; the white rehab trailer that provides basic necessities to the volunteers like warmth, food and water; the rescue truck that carries the jaws of life and medical equipment and the tanker truck that was purchased with \$40,000 fundraised through the bass fishing derby that happens annually.

And if you are seriously considering serving your community by joining the volunteer fire fighters, you can apply at the township office in Sydenham. Today's applicants require a physical exam and a medical certificate, an interview, a driver's license or the intention of acquiring one, and of course a strong desire to serve the members of the community.

All volunteers who serve and train are compensated by hourly pay.

I think that Mr. Babcock and Mr. Lappen would agree that serving the community as a volunteer fire fighter is a challenging undertaking, but it is one that also comes with many rewards. On June 7 at Station 4 in Hartington you'll be able to ask them