

Proud and humble, Acton fire fighters celebrate their rich service legacy

'The Stud' – finally at home

Standing beside a showroom-worthy 1926 Studebaker Bickle fire truck that he drove to Acton fires in the 1950s, retired Acton District Chief Bern Van Fleet smiled as he recalled his days as a firefighter, which ended with retirement in 1982.

"Looking at the truck and the pictures – it is just fantastic. It's great to come back here...my thirty years (of firefighting) it was like being family," Van Fleet said prior to the official opening ceremony of the fire department's Heritage Museum at the Churchill Road station on Saturday.

The fire truck, known affectionately as "The Stud" is the centrepiece of the Heritage Museum, part of an expansion to the station, which allowed for a workout room for firefighters and a return to a dedicated training room. For some Acton firefighters and their wives, the Studebaker, acquired by Acton in 1940, played a part in their weddings.

Jean McPhail, newly married to firefighter George Kirwin McPhail, was driven through Fairview Cemetery on June 23, 1953, "That was the best ride we had all day. It was cool and it was 90 in the shade that day," Jean McPhail said on Saturday, adding the Studebaker never looked better.

Welcoming approximately 180 people to a dinner in the fire truck bays after the opening ceremony, which included a symbolic hose cutting with veteran Acton firefighters and the newest recruit, AFFA Chair Bob Andrews said the Heritage Museum provides a

platform for Acton to celebrate the heritage of fire fighting in Acton.

In his grace, Fire Chaplain, the Reverend Petter Barrow prayed for those who give their time and energy, so that "by their strength, the people of this town shall be able to sleep in peace and know that if the worst happens, they will be rescued." He also prayed for wives, mothers and significant others who stand behind firefighters as they save lives.

Halton Hills Fire Chief Brent Marshall, who celebrates 40 years of firefighting in May, said while his heart is in Acton, his first job is to take a balanced role to the whole town when it comes to fire services. "This (Museum) took 10 or 12 years – it was a dream because we had no home for "The Stud", Chief Marshall said, joking he was talking about the beloved Studebaker, not Lloyd McIntyre.

Marshall said the Heritage Museum became a reality because of the love and commitment that firefighters and local politicians have to preserving part of their past. He acknowledged he had to "justify" spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to upgrade and expand the Acton District One fire station, and thanked the Acton Fire Fighters Association for raising \$41,000 for the project.

"I couldn't be more proud of what we've accomplished. I couldn't be more proud of this Fire Department, and I couldn't be more proud of this Association," Marshall said, adding the Museum will allow them to keep their heritage alive.



RICH HERITAGE: A hose cutting ceremony officially opened the Acton Fire Fighters Association's Heritage Room at the Churchill Road station on Saturday. Taking part in the ceremony were, from left: Bob Andrews, Chair of the AFFA, Chief Brent Marshall, former chiefs Bern and Don Van Fleet, new recruit Dale Hewitt, AFFA historian Al Scott, Dufferin Aggregates rep. Andrea Bourrie and Halton Hills Mayor Rock Bonnette. – Frances Niblock photo



BUCKET BRIGADE: On one wall in the new Heritage Museum at the Acton fire hall, there is a 20 x 13-foot mural, made from a picture taken by famed Acton photographer A.T. Brown, of an Acton fire circa 1880s when men, some straight from the farm in their overalls and straw farm hats, passed buckets of water up a ladder to the flames of an unnamed building. – Frances Niblock photo

The rich history of firefighting in Acton was showcased in a video compiled by AFFA heritage co-ordinator Al Scott, detailing how firefighting

in Acton evolved from a bucket brigade in the mid-1880s through the decades to the present day.

Many of the people and organizations that gave

their time and talents to the expansion project received

certificates of thanks from the fire department.

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