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A Metroland Community Newspaper

Wednesday, February 24, 1988

At firehall Deputy chief enjoys duties

By BRUCE STAPLEY
 For Murray Emmerson, new Deputy Fire Chief for the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, running a fire department is very much like running your own business. And he should know.

For 20 years, he was the driving force behind Murray Emmerson Enterprises, a Hygrade Fuels home heating and service outlet. However, he's since left his wife Evelyn in charge, becoming Chief Bill Brown's right hand man last September.

Murray, who has been with the Stouffville Fire Department for 12 years, was promoted to captain three years ago. When the position of deputy chief became available, he was chosen.

"It's not just an 8 to 4 job," says the new deputy chief, who will also be in charge of the department's fire prevention program. "Sometimes you just keep running until you finally see daylight."

Business operation

Like a business, Murray maintains it's important he try to run the fire department as effectively and economically as he can.

"But you hate to see yourself without the right equipment sometimes, or without the necessary manpower for any eventuality."

He cites a case in point when, a few weeks ago two separate calls came within two minutes. Fortunately, the manpower and equipment was available to look after both calls.

"You're considering the safety of your men on the one hand," he says. "But on the other, you always have to be ready for that other call."

It seems with fires, it never rains but it pours. Things had been going pretty smoothly until fire broke out at three homes in the same week in mid-February. And if a call comes in the middle of the night, the deputy chief and chief are still expected to show up first thing the next morning to perform their regular duties.

Lots of paper work

"There's always a lot of paper work to be done right after a house fire," Murray claims. "Then you've got to go over all the equipment to make sure it's ready for the next call."

Since being promoted to deputy chief, the Manitoba Street resident has been busy keeping up with his new duties. "We're playing catch up. There's so much you have to be on top of."

He says the new pumper has gone a long way towards equipping the department to handle the ever-growing needs of the town. The \$250,000 machine, acquired last September, is one of the latest pumpers on the market. It features a top-mount pump control panel, and powerful strobe lights powered by an independent generator. "That's a great asset

at night," says Murray. "In the past it could get pretty dangerous with our guys working in the dark."

Full-time force

He says it's inevitable the town will someday be forced to go with a full-time fire department. "We're going to continue to get bigger. But hopefully, we can stay with our volunteer system for a few years yet."

Murray maintains the 30 volunteers who man the District One firehall in Stouffville, along with the 10 who look after District Two (Ballantrae), are a capable group who work well as a team. "We've been lucky to have the volunteers we do."

He claims while the overall number of calls increases by about 15 per cent annually, these are not all fire related. "We're also called for automobile accidents, or whenever there is the need for a quick response by a group of men like we send out."

Back-ups available

While he's constantly concerned with leaving the hall short-staffed if two serious fire calls come it at once, he explains his department has a mutual agreement with others in the vicinity. This leaves him free to call upon Markham, Aurora, Newmarket, Mount Albert, Uxbridge and Pickering fire halls if the need arises.

He feels while there are challenges, and some long hours on occasion, firefighting is a rewarding career. "You're trying to provide a service," he says.

There is a constant need to update your skills, he adds, citing his upcoming fire prevention course at the Gravenhurst Fire College. "I've taken a lot of courses. You have to keep up with everything—automobile extrication, hazardous materials, and more."

Lots of respect

Taking the job as deputy chief has helped Murray develop a respect for the entire firefighting system, from the top down. "I'm more or less seeing it all put together from this vantage point," he claims.

And he enjoys the responsibility. "You have to make some pretty quick decisions sometimes. And you always hope someone will say, 'yes you made the right decision.'"



Photo/JIM THOMAS

At your service

Deputy Fire Chief Murray Emmerson perches atop a new pumper purchased by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire Department. Murray was appointed deputy chief

in September and enjoys the position although he's found it's not just an 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. job.

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