

Faithful firefighter says farewell

By KATE GILDERDALE
STOUFFVILLE — Whitchurch-Stouffville volunteer firefighter Charles Jackson has hung up his heavy hat and coat and stashed away his long rubber boots after 30 years' service.

Charles joined the local brigade in April, 1958, and found the experience rewarding and worthwhile.

"You never knew what you were going to get into," he comments in recalling some experiences.

He admits he'll miss his colleagues.

"There's a wonderful feeling of comradeship," he says. However, he feels the time had come to make a break.

"These days we respond to a lot more accidents," he explains. "They really get me down. At one time, we dealt mainly with bush, grass and barn fires."

Charles points to the fact many people unaccustomed to living in an area served by a volunteer fire brigade, are often surprised when they see a truck or car, its lights flashing and horn blaring, roar up from behind at high speed.

One blaze he'll never forget was in 1971 when the Ratcliff Block on the south-east corner of Market and Main Streets burned down.

"We fought that fire for 34 hours," he recalls. "Markham and Uxbridge Fire Departments were called in to help."

While the Department can

usually find volunteers for night duty, daytime emergencies are a different matter.

"The biggest problem is obtaining firefighters during the day," comments Charles. "In the last few years, businesses have been reluctant to have employees drop what they're doing and rush away every time the siren sounds. It can be very expensive for companies."

Over a period of 30 years, Charles tried not to miss any calls.

"When you're around, you go," he says simply, "sometimes only two or three of us would show up. There was no way of knowing how many would be there."

Charles would be disappointed to see a full-time fire-fighting department in Town. "I'd rather see more volunteers," he says.

He admits fighting fire can be risky business, but recalls few problems.

"Sure, we've had people injured but nothing serious," he notes.

When Charles joined the brigade, little formal training was available.

"Regular work sessions are held twice a month now. There are more chemical spills these days. Also, we have to know how to extricate drivers and passengers from wrecked cars," he explains.

The ambulance service operated out of the Stouffville fire station has been a tremendous

help, Mr. Jackson says. "They can back us up; they know our capabilities and we know theirs."

Charles has worked in Stouffville all his life. When he first became a firefighter, he was the Village deputy-treasurer.

Back then, he recalls, municipal employees would go three years without increases in salaries. With a young family to support, he couldn't afford to stay. He had to look for another job.

He joined the staff of Stouffville Machine and Tool as an accountant and secretary-treasurer.

"When I came on the scene, it was owned by an American company," he says. "In 1976, it was bought back by the son of the original owner, and in 1984, I bought him out."

Both lifelong Stouffville residents, Charles and Carol Jackson had four children, three sons and a daughter. One son was killed in a drowning accident five years ago. Their oldest son lives at home. Their other son and married daughter reside in Stouffville. They have one grandchild. Mr. Jackson's mother, widowed in 1979, also lives in town.

During his firefighting years, Charles served as the brigade's secretary-treasurer from 1964 to 1977. As secretary-treasurer of the High School Board, he found himself swamped with work.

"I was working more hours part-time than I was full time," he smiles.

Mr. Jackson was also a direc-

tor on the board of the Stouffville and District Credit Union and president for one year. He's been a member of Richardson Masonic Lodge since 1965.

Charles enjoys living in Stouffville with all members of his family close at hand. He and Carol are busy renovating the exterior of their century-old home

on Main Street. Yes, he may have retired from fighting fires, but it seems unlikely he'll have any trouble finding other things to keep him just as busy.



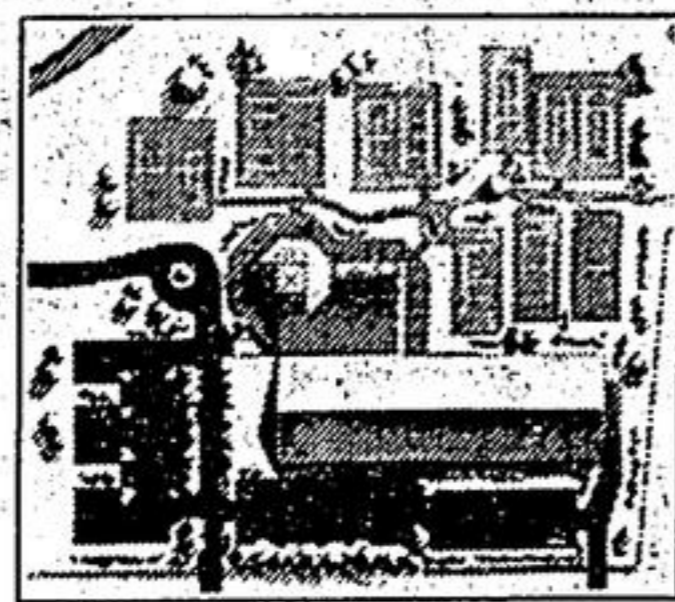
Stouffville's Charles Jackson, a volunteer firefighter 30 years, said farewell to his associates at a presentation ceremony Monday night. Charles admits he'll miss the friendships he's made, describing "the tremendous feeling of comradeship" within the firefighting force. —Jim Thomas

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