

NES Members Receive Provincial Long Service Awards

I was asked by Fire Chief Ashbee to write an article on our NES member whom are receiving the awards. I graciously accepted, thinking. This should be easy! I've written articles for the Paper many times.

But this isn't easy. Not only are these members whom I work alongside, these are members who, are my family. Not by blood, but over the course of the years I have been a member, we have all become family. Banded together to have one another's back. Be there when our community needs us.

My words however, will never be able to highlight how we all feel, or what we want to say about our members.

This year five (5) members of Neebing Emergency Services received Provincial Long Service Awards recognizing their 165 years of collective dedication to the fire service. Those members included:

40 Year Service Bar

Leo Lafontaine – 40 years

Born in Montreal, Leo spent most of his formative years growing up in Sioux Lookout. He attended the U of Minnesota – Duluth, majoring in Physics and Chemistry. Leo and his wife Betty became residents of Neebing in 1969 – pre amalgamation, raising 2 children in the community.

An early instigator and supporter of a volunteer fire service in Neebing, Leo was appointed as Fire Warden for Blake in 79-80 and played a key role in the early organization of the fire service for Blake, including the building of Blake fire Hall at the intersection of Highways 61 and 608.

Leo has played a number of roles in the development of the Fire Service for Neebing, including a number of years in the late 80's as Fire Chief and in recent years, a most valued role in the community as that of District Chief – Fire Prevention & Public Education.

Leo has seen many changes through his 40 years of volunteering with Neebing, with his most memorable moments including; when the Municipality assumed responsibility for the fire services in Neebing, and the day the rookie volunteer Fire Fighting team beat the veteran Fire Fighting team in an extinguishment competition.



Kris Ligate – 40 years

Married to Wendy, a stepfather to 3, grandfather to 4.

Kris was very young when he joined the service. He started riding with his father to scenes, with his own gear in tow and told to grab a nozzle and start spraying water on the fire. At the time he first became exposed to it, the pumper was housed in John Dykstra's machine shed, before Hall 1 was built. He remembers back when a call out was on a phone line with 12 on a party line, CB radios in the trucks and a homemade tanker truck once Hall 1 was built.



The fire service is literally in his blood. His father and grandfather were also Fire Fighters. Kris' dedication has run deep in the service, He was a student, a teacher and a trainer for many years. His role with NES is a crucial one. He is the Air Boss, in charge of servicing and maintaining our SCBA ensuring that firefighters have safe clean air to breathe while working in smoky conditions. Kris holds the rank of Lieutenant within the department and also has sat on the Neebing Fire and Rescue Associations board for many years, helping raise money for the Department, most well-known for his extraordinary efforts to recycle mountains of pop cans from municipal landfill sites to help raise funds for the department.

His passions are woodwork and collecting Fire Fighter memorabilia.

30 Year Service Bar

Bernie Oleksuk – 30 years

Very affectionately known as 'Uncle Bernie' to many. He was born in Fort William, was schooled at Blake Central and then went on to Selkirk Vocational. He is married to Frances and they have raised two children, Mary-Ann and Bernie Jr. in the community.

Bernie is a career Truck Driver and has taught many NES volunteers how to safely respond with one of the 'big red trucks' to a fire scene. He enjoys travelling and snowmobiling. Bernie became interested in the fire service from neighbouring fire fighters already involved and saw an opportunity to put himself forward to contribute to the community as a volunteer. He enjoys working with fellow fire fighters and learning new procedures and familiarizing himself with the new equipment that comes along. Bernie played a key role in the amalgamation of the 3 different fire departments in the municipality and served as Deputy Fire Chief for a time.



Stephen Elliot – 30 years

Married to Julie.

In March of 1989 Steve moved to Scoble, shortly after, he learned that he was a new member of the Scoble Fire team when he read about it in the Scoble Scoop that summer! A colleague of his, Frank Luckai who lived in Scoble, put his name forth for the department without him knowing. He has been a dedicated member ever since. He fought Forest fires for 3 summers, enjoying it immensely, so the Scoble Fire team seemed like a great progression. And he has graced us with knowledge and education every wildfire Season.



25 Year Long Service Medal

Ken Armstrong – 25 years

Following his Graduation from Fort William Collegiate Institute, Ken joined the Canadian Army in 1965. For a total of 39 years in regular Forces, Reserve and Cadets, Ken served his Country proud.

Ken had a cottage on Cloud Lake and became a member of NES in 1994 shortly after a neighbour encouraged him to join the Department.

With wife Jan, Ken moved to Neebing full time in 1999 when both became increasingly involved in fire department and fund raising activities.

Over the past 25 years, Ken has served the Department in a number of positions, that of – Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, Captain, and Training officer. He has also been responsible for delivering fire trucks to Northern Communities over the Ice Roads. Ken enjoys learning and teaching about fire cause determination and investigating the causes of fire in the community.



Neebing Service Pins

In addition to the Provincial Long Service Awards, Neebing also recognizes the dedicated service of its volunteers by presentation of a Service Pin at five (5) year increments. The 2019 recipients ranged from 5 to 20 years of service.

The recipients included:

Meaghan Forneri – 20 years

Beverly Mercer – 20 years

Chris Price – 15 years

Dan Cavicchiolo – 15 years

Jodi Halunga – 10 years

Eric Bruekelman – 5 years

Dylan Patterson – 5 years

Landon Broennle – 5 years



Congratulations to All Long Service Award recipients in 2019 for their dedication to serving the residents of Neebing.

Please take a moment, and be grateful that we live in a community where we have such dedicated members in our Fire Department. And if you have the opportunity , don't forget to thank those members, whom have dedicated their time, sacrificed bedtime stores, dinner and falling asleep beside their loved ones, to help our Community and those in need.

Stay Safe

Wendy Scott-Ligate