

Caledon firefighter speaks out for double-hatters before AMO

By Bill Rea

Caledon's double-hatters are continuing with their efforts to continue serving in their community, and they have lots of support. And that includes from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

Caledon District Chief Mandy Gould of the Inglewood station drew two standing ovations last week when she addressed more than 1,000 delegates at the AMO conference in Ottawa. She was one of five double-hatters in Caledon found to be in violation the rules of the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 1068 (Brampton). The ruling came down in June, and is being appealed.

Double-hatters, also known as two-hatters, are full-time professional firefighters who also volunteer their off-duty time answering calls in their home communities.

"I was not really sure what to expect, but it was quite the experience, that's for sure," Gould told this Citizen this week.

AMO has been supporting double-hatters in their struggle for some time, and Gould said she was glad for the opportunity to raise awareness of the situation, since many municipalities make use of these professionals as part of their fire service.

Gould's presentation drew very positive reviews.

"Mandy Gould was a star in her performance," Mayor Allan Thompson declared.

"She did an excellent job," he added. "She nailed it."

"I was super-proud of Mandy Gould," Councillor Jennifer Innis remarked. "There were people in the audience who actually had tears in their eyes when she presented."

"It was awesome how it rippled through the conference," Councillor Barb Shaughnessy reflected on the reaction Gould drew. "She was awesome."

Shaughnessy also pointed out Caledon needs volunteers in its fire service, since having just full-time firefighters would be cost-prohibitive.

"There wasn't a dry eye in the house; in the whole conference," AMO President Lynn Dollin said. "She was the only one who drew a standing ovation."

Dollin is the deputy mayor of the Town of Innisfil, and she said they've had some issues there involving double-hatters and their union.

AMO is continuing with its efforts to keep the fight going.

"Hopefully, at some point, common sense will prevail," she remarked.

There have been some improvements over the last couple of years.

The government passed Bill 109, the Employment and Labour Statute Law Amendment Act, which addresses the double-hatter situation, among other things.

AMO made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy in November 2015.

"Full-time firefighter have valuable skills to offer local communities in Ontario," the presentation stated.

"It is important to remember that full-time firefighters love their communities and want to contribute," it added. "Volunteer firefighting is one central way in which they do so. AMO appreciates the courageous position of volunteer firefighters who believe in the principle of freedom to volunteer in their communities."

Dollin said the bill provides some security. It prevents these people from losing their jobs for volunteering, but it doesn't stop the unions from fining them, or pressuring them to stop.

"So it's not enough," she observed. "It's something, but it's not enough."

She added AMO is looking to see legislation that will prevent unions from taking such action. She pointed out Ontario and Newfoundland are the only province that don't have such legislation.

"It's just not fair, and you shouldn't be picking on people just for being good citizens and volunteering in their own community," she said.