

Camp Molly bringing services to Caledon, area

By **Riley Murphy**

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Camp Molly is a free, four-day camp for young women and non-binary youth aged 15-18, providing a hands-on firefighting experience and this year, it's coming to Caledon and will be held at the state-of-the-art training facility in Caledon Village.

The camp aims to showcase a career in the fire service as a viable and rewarding option.

It imparts a wide array of information from firefighting, medical, communications, education, and more.

Monique Belair, President and Founder of Camp Molly, was Deputy Fire Chief in Oakville, when she prioritized fostering female talent in firefighting and founded Camp Molly in 2019.

By 2024, Camp Molly had expanded to Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan and partnered with the National Indigenous Fire Safety Council.

Belair said it all began when she ran a leadership program with the local high schools to allow some girls to come out and try the training campus.

During the program, one of the girls shared that she almost wasn't allowed to participate because a family member told her not to waste her career day because "women can't be firefighters."

Belair faced adversity when she first started in fire service and said hearing that women were still told this isn't an option for them 35 years later sparked a light bulb for her.

After that, she ran the first Camp Molly and now runs about 10 camps yearly.

The camp's vision is "Be prepared to be challenged, be prepared to be empowered, be prepared to change the way you see yourself."

Belair shared that one of the things that shaped that vision was statistics regarding how young women in Grades 6 to 10 see themselves.

She said that after working with campers, it completely changed her vision for the camp.

"It's not just about a career in fire services, Camp Molly is about how we feel inside of ourselves," said Belair.

"If I could describe to you what a girl looks like when she starts on Thursday morning to when she ends on Sunday, it's indescribable. Every volunteer, every instructor that comes to Camp Molly says how much it changes these girls, but until you see it firsthand, you have no idea what we've done for these girls."

Belair shared how much the camp has had an impact on her.

"When I see these girls and we interact with them and we see their smiles and the sense of accomplishment, it's life-changing. It's the best thing I've ever done in the fire service."

The camp will take approximately 35 campers and will run from September 4 to 7.

Registration for the camp is on now.

Belair shared that one of the things she is adamant about is ensuring a camper never has to say they cannot attend because they can't afford it.

All PPE is supplied, including bunker gear, helmets, gloves, masks, lunches, t-shirts, water bottles, and gym bags; everything is done through fundraising.

'Just come and try,' shared Belair. 'Don't put expectations on yourself. Never let your size or your ethnicity or your gender be the reason you said, 'if only'.'