

Orangeville Fire Service looking to recruit new volunteer firefighters

By Joshua Drakes

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Orangeville Fire Service is looking to recruit a new group of volunteer firefighters this year as it works to fill vacancies created through retirements and other departures, ensuring the department maintains enough personnel to respond to big emergencies.

The department expects about four volunteer openings by the end of the year.

While Orangeville maintains a full-time firefighting staff around the clock, volunteer firefighters play a critical role by responding when incidents require additional personnel beyond the department's regular on-duty crew.

Orangeville Fire Chief John Snider said that the new positions don't require prior experience to apply. Training and education are provided to recruits.

"We're diverse," he said. "There's a lot of great people who have never had the time or ability to go and do a pretraining or do college courses and things like that. We're happy to train good people. For us, it really is finding a good person that wants to contribute to the community, and this is a great avenue to do that."

Instead, the department is looking for community-minded individuals who are at least 18 years old and willing to commit to extensive training, emergency call responses and public education events throughout the year.

Candidates must complete an aptitude test, an interview process, and a physical assessment to ensure they can safely perform the job's demanding tasks.

Despite the title, the term "volunteer firefighter" can be somewhat misleading, according to Snider.

"The name volunteer is a bit of a misnomer," he said. "I think back 30-40 years ago, it really was volunteer work. They weren't paid. It was kind of when you could come, and you came. We obviously put a lot more requirements on them, and they are paid [per call]. We're one of the best-paid volunteer groups in the province. We try to take very good care of our volunteers, and they would have access to town benefits as well."

New recruits undergo a six-month training program, attending weekly sessions while also participating in ride-alongs with full-time firefighters to gain practical experience. Although recruits begin responding to incidents after approximately six weeks, becoming a first-class firefighter is a gradual process that typically takes four to five years.

Throughout that time, recruits are paired with experienced firefighters who mentor them, ensuring newer members develop their skills gradually while always working alongside seasoned personnel.

Alongside the requirements to respond to calls, Snider said that volunteer firefighters have a number of other jobs and commitments that come with the role.

"There's a lot of training," he said. "We do weekly training, so basically 50 times a year on Mondays we do training for them, and then the expectation of attending the calls that can go off at two in the morning sometimes, and things that are beyond the capacity of our one truck."

"We do a lot of public education events as well. So, they'll go out and work at the fall fair, they'll work at Blues and Jazz [Festival]"

and do some public education with our staff as well.?

Orangeville Fire Service operates as a composite department, with a small full-time complement staffing one truck around the clock and a larger volunteer force of roughly 32 firefighters who respond to larger incidents and support emergency operations across the community.

Snider said that the department responded to thousands of calls last year, and roughly half involved medical responses.

?Last year we ran just under 2,000 calls,? he said. ?About 50 per cent of our calls involve a patient, so that can be the result of a fire or a car accident, for example. So, we do a lot of pre-hospital medical support for paramedics here in Dufferin.?

Firefighters also regularly attend vehicle collisions, automatic alarm activations, carbon monoxide incidents and technical rescues, while approximately 400 calls each year are directly related to fires, ranging from smoke investigations to structure and industrial fires.

Snider said volunteering offers residents an opportunity to make a meaningful difference close to home by helping friends, neighbours and family members during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

?We get called to people's places or places of work where they're having the worst days, and we can have a positive impact and make it a little less worse,? he said. ?You're doing it for your friends and family and neighbours and your community. You see in all these calls what an impact you have on the community and it is very rewarding.?

With a community-focused department and a variety of roles and advancement opportunities, the Orangeville Fire Service has a lot to offer potential volunteers looking to explore a career in emergency services.

Residents interested in joining the department are encouraged to attend one of the mandatory information sessions, where they can learn more about the recruitment process, speak with current firefighters and determine whether the role is the right fit before applications officially open.

Orangeville Fire will soon announce the dates of the mandatory information session for interested applicants.