

Union ruling against double hatters will be appealed

By Bill Rea

The ruling is in from the International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) Local 1068 (Brampton), and it's not good news for Caledon's double hatters.

A union tribunal found they had been in violation of the union constitution and bylaws by volunteering their firefighting services while being employed full-time with the fire department in Brampton.

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

The ruling, which came down last week, stated the admissions of the firefighters "proves beyond a reasonable doubt that they are guilty of working secondary employment as a volunteer firefighter," adding they are "guilty of misconduct under IAFF Constitution and Bylaws."

The ruling stated the accused are suspended from the union until they resign their volunteer positions, and they are subject to fines of \$500 per month, increasing to \$1,000 per month after six months, \$1,500 after a year and \$2,000 after 18 months.

Mayor Allan Thompson reiterated his support for the double-hatters, adding there are plans for an appeal.

"This decision in no way lessens the commitment and support we have made to our two hatters," he stated. "The Caledon community and council stands with them."

He added he was not surprised at the ruling. "It was their own union judging their employees," he observed, adding this matter might have to go to the Supreme Court to get resolved.

"We're prepared to do that," he said.

Thompson pointed out double-hatters are used all over North America, but the only jurisdictions where it seems to be a problem are Ontario and Newfoundland.

"Why?" he wondered. "Why is it happening here?"

District Chief Mandy Gould of the Inglewood station is one of the double hatters up on charges, with 13 years of volunteer experience. She said she learned of the ruling last Monday, and she confirmed the decision is going to be appealed.

"We're still kind of digesting what's happened," she commented, adding she and her colleagues are appreciative of the support they have been receiving from the community.

Gould understood the matter will be referred to the head of IAFF, which is based in the United States.

"I want to continue to do what I love, which is to serve my community, just as my father did," she commented. "This is my own time, and for a union to tell me what to do with my spare time doesn't sit well with me."

"I can do anything I want in my spare time, except what I'm trained and experienced to do, which is fire fighting," she added.

Town CAO Mike Galloway said there's a three-step appeal process, and the first will be through IAFF.

"We will exhaust that avenue first," he said, adding the matter probably won't be heard until the IAFF's 2018 convention, which will be next August, then it would go the Labour Relations Board.

Galloway added that during the appeal, any fines and sanctions are held in abeyance.

"This is not a quick process," he said.