

Metchosin, Langford junior firefighter programs prepare for future



By Goldstream News Gazette

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A pager beep alerts three Metchosin teens to every emergency in the district. They awaken in the night to dispatch calls for car crashes, house fires and cardiac arrests.

When a few of Grayson Kerr's friends became junior firefighter's with Langford Fire Rescue, he thought it would be

a great opportunity. He approached the Langford department and learned he had to apply with the department in his community of Metchosin.

"It's an awesome program. It's a way to get people in the department when some halls are struggling to get members," Kerr said.

Metchosin fire Chief Stephanie Dunlop said most junior firefighters stay with the department after they become 19.

These junior firefighters can't respond directly to calls, but they can rush to the hall and help firefighters gather equipment and clean the trucks afterwards.

"I like to listen to all the calls and show up and help too," said Dallin Madill, 17.

"They do training like the rest of us," said Dunlop. "We treat them just as a regular member. We give them a pager and want them to feel valued and important so they take it seriously."

When the teens are out in the field or during training they wear blue helmets to differentiate between the adult volunteers.

The junior firefighters also play a key role in public education and fundraising.

During the three years spent as junior firefighters the teens study and take courses through the Justice Institute of B.C. When they turn 19 they only need to take a couple more courses and then they become certified firefighters through the National Fire Protection Association.

"It broadens their horizons with their future life goals," Dunlop said. "They learn to understand other people and to see that there is more to life than school, cars and girls."

Sam Harle, 17, and Madill are second generation firefighters. Madill's father Mike just retired after volunteering for 13 years and Harle's father Neil is a five-year veteran.

"I remember hearing my dad's pager go off in the middle of the night and he would go off on calls to help people," said Madill, who plans to pursue a career in firefighting.

Metchosin has 37 firefighters including the three juniors. Four junior firefighters are on board at Langford fire department and most move on to become full members when they are 19. They have 52 volunteer firefighters and eight career members.

The junior program in Langford is only open to teens 16 and 17 years old.

"We don't get enough time to train 18-year-olds before they turn 19 to become full members," said assistant chief Scott Davidson of Langford Fire Rescue. "We have better success when they've been junior members for three years."

To join either Langford or Metchosin's junior firefighter program all applicants must be at least 16 and live within the municipality.

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