

One volunteer's remarkable journey to the fire hall

By Mark Pavilons

We never want to see a full equipped firefighter at our front door, but we take comfort knowing they're only a few minutes out.

But for little Timmy or Suzie, they look up to the men and women in uniform in so many ways.

The proud statement "my dad's a fireman" resonates in the hearts of our children, and speaks volumes about the time-honoured profession.

The story of one King volunteer firefighter is not a typical one. It came quite by accident.

Schomberg's Neale Nicholas has been serving locally for the past four years. An ad for volunteer firefighters in the local paper caught his attention and he thought he'd give back in his spare time. He literally thought that in this capacity he would run errands, help around the station and roll up the hoses.

Little did he know what was in store. Into his rigorous training, he knew this was serious business and he found the training quite intense. When he was taken on by King Fire and Emergency Services, he'd become an efficient, well trained first responder.

He's part of a finely tuned organization, led by Chief Jim Wall. Nicholas is a strong believer that "good leadership leads to good workmanship."

They come together as a team to get the job done. Nicholas said giving respect and getting along is key to every fire station and crew.

King's family of firefighters are considered among the best and the term "volunteer" seems to be meaningful only on paper. As Nicholas points out, there's no such thing as "a volunteer fire."

On the truck, as the firefighters are en route to a scene, they are given specific duties, forming a strategy and

Getting to know those who serve

game plan before they arrive.

Nicholas recalls his first few emergencies, including some fatal car accidents. He takes it all in because it's part of the job and he tries not to let it bother him. The reality is we all lose loved ones.

But on the flip side, people are happy to see them come to the rescue. "They know help is here," he said.

Nicholas was motivated by his sense of giving back, and knowing where he came from.

"Look at me today," smiles Nicholas, who hails from Grenada. "I always remember where I came from."

He's from a large family with 11 bothers and sisters who all still live in that island nation located northwest of Trinidad and Tobago. The "Island of Spice" is some 344 square kilometres and home to 110,000 inhabitants. The country has had a troubled past, with a U.S.-led invasion in the 1980s to the devastating Hurricanes Ivan and Emily in 2004 and 2005.

Nicholas gives back whenever he can and he has sent supplies to local schools. He donates uniforms to children who play both cricket and soccer. And he visits his family when he can.

They're quite proud of Neale becoming a firefighter in a foreign country. And they have every reason to be.

Putting service above himself is one aspect. Being a role model to his own children is another.

"I do it for my kids," he said. "Children know what they see and I set an example."

Moving to Schomberg with his family was one of the best things he's ever done.



When Schomberg's Neale Nicholas decided to volunteer for King Fire & Emergency Services, he thought he'd be rolling up hoses. He is now a well trained first responder.

Photo by Mark Pavilons

His volunteer efforts haven't gone unnoticed. Nicholas received the Paul Jackson Memorial Award, given to a fire department staff member who exemplifies the values, dedication and commitment that was demonstrated by Training Officer Paul Jackson. Paul Jackson was the fire department's training officer who passed away in 2008.

Nicholas remembers being quite surprised at this vote of confidence by his peers.

And he learns from those very same peers, both veterans and newcomers alike. Every firefighter brings his-her

own skills and knowledge to the station and has something valuable to share.

Nicholas said he loves meeting new people and new recruits. He loves the camaraderie and his extended firefighting family. He gets excited when the pager goes off and he races out to a call.

It's another way for him to give back. Nicholas also owns and operates his own landscaping and snow removal business.

It doesn't matter how Neale Nicholas found his way to the fire station. The fact is he did. And we're better off because of it.



Carting Dogs thrill Guides

The Good Guys Carting Dogs, with roots in King, were pleased to bring their dogs to Bolton recently, to girls and parents of the First Bolton Guides. The organization, founded in 1987, is a small group of dedicated dog owners who take time out to support worthwhile community services by way of fundraising events. For more, visit thegoodguyscartingdogs.ca.



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