

Even off duty, firefighter's sense of commitment goes beyond borders



By Brock Weir

Firefighters are often referred to as "heroes among us" for the brave work they do within the community, but their work is not limited to what they do on the truck or on their beat – and Aurora native Adam Simson is proof of that.

The former G.W. Williams and Aurora High School Student has always subscribed to the belief that when it comes to emergency services there are no borders to helping. When an opportunity arose to put on his running shoes and help Ryan Humphrey, a former pilot for American Airlines, he didn't think twice.

Mr. Simson, who himself battled back to his dreams of working on a fire truck after a serious injury in the line of duty threatened to take him offline all together nearly four years ago, saw his own similarities with Ryan.

While Adam dreamed of being a firefighter from his earliest days of playing with toy fire trucks and plastic fire helmets and equipment, Ryan had his dreams of being a pilot.

Adam went through school and intensive training to achieve that dream of being on that truck responding to fire and medical calls. Ryan watched from the Customer Service desk he was manning for the airline with stars in his eyes watching the pilots head off into the wild blue yonder. He followed them five years ago becoming a commercial jet pilot for the carrier.

Unlike Adam, who was able to use physiotherapy and other efforts to get back on track, Ryan did not fare so lucky when he was diagnosed with angiosarcoma, an aggressive and rare form of cancer which, after lung surgery, left him unable to pass standard pilot health screenings.

Now back at that customer service desk, and with his health somewhat back on track, Ryan is not taking it lying down and has devoted himself to raising awareness of this particular form of cancer of which so little is known.

Adam first heard of Ryan's plight from his cousin, Denise, who works for the same airline and when the opportunity presented itself to participate in Ryan's Angiosarcoma Awareness 5k Run/Walk in Troy, Michigan, he jumped at the chance to help out.

"I lost two very good friends of mine on the fire truck, including a captain who passed away about eight or nine years ago from cancer, and I just lost a very good friend of mine to cancer off the truck and we had always worked together from our days in the East York fire department. As soon as I heard Ryan needed assistance and my cousin asked, anything I could do to spread awareness, even out there, I jumped on it.

?Ryan ended up organizing it, he did it all in a month. It was a really inspirational weekend to go out there and meet other people and survivors, and they appreciated the fact I came from Canada. I always believe there are no borders, no matter what.?

As someone who spends a significant part of his day responding to medical calls and to people who are living with certain health issues, he says he is always of the belief that the more you can do the better. There is a lot more one can do for the community when one is off duty, he adds.

But when on the truck, he is living out his childhood dream, a fact he is eager to tell the endless parade of young boys and girls that come to fire stations across York Region and in the Greater Toronto Area. If they too spend endless hours playing with fire trucks, as he did, they can look at him and see that it is possible to achieve one's dreams

While he says it is indeed all he dreamed it was cracked up to be, it's not without its challenges. His own health battles aside, certain calls can be particularly challenging, such as people ?deliberately trying to cause harm to others.?

?That is very challenging trying to prevent that from happening and hurting people, and people get hurt because of that, he says.
?The most fulfilling part is when we respond to a call and are able to help somebody and it just makes someone feel better.

?I remember when I was a rookie responding to one of my first house fires, there were children, they lost a lot of their stuff and we grabbed one of our Dalmatian stuffed animals, walked over and gave them to them, and just that smile on their face. Suddenly you take something that is bad and really turn it around.?

There is yet another example of the similarities between Adam and Ryan.