

## ?Girl Power? saluted as CYFS welcomes all-female graduating class



The courage to ?step forward when others are stepping back? was celebrated by the Central York Fire Services last week at Aurora's Ian Laing Headquarters as the local fire service celebrated the graduation of its three newest members ? an all-female graduating class that not only broke down barriers but cemented sisterly bonds.

The above words were shared by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy as firefighters Nicole Bruce, Fatemeh Hajjari, and Brienne Nelson formally joined the force after a 12-week training program.

Bruce comes to the CYFS after a time with Durham Region Paramedic Services and a degree from the Southwest Fire Academy. Hajjari brings military experience to the local force as a Combat Engineer with the Canadian Armed Forces. Nelson, on the other hand, comes to the table after working as an Environmental Engineer.

?Today we celebrate the results of your discipline, your courage and your dedication,? said Newmarket-Aurora MP Sandra Cobena, who couldn't resist a celebratory ?Girl Power!? in her remarks. ?First aid isn't a job, it's a promise to protect, to respond without hesitation, and to serve with integrity.

?You have joined the front lines of safety in Newmarket and Aurora. When our community faces fear or crisis, it will be you they rely on?. Fire-fighting is about teamwork and compassion and trust. I know that you will carry those values with pride in every call. On behalf of everyone in Newmarket and Aurora, thank you for stepping up. We are proud of your achievements, grateful for your service, and we stand with you every step of the way.?

Costas Menegakis, MP for Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, also saluted the importance of frontline workers in our communities, adding: ?Our frontline workers are truly the walking heroes in our communities. Today, I am so proud to be here to say congratulations to three outstanding individuals who are joining the ranks of walking heroes in our communities.?

For MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, the courage in question is a matter of being able to ?face uncertainty, danger, and immense pressure.?

?And still, you chose to serve,? she said. ?That's what defines a firefighter. Tonight I want to speak directly about another kind of courage, one that often goes unseen: the courage of women in the fire service. In Canada, only 11% of firefighters are women. That number is growing, but every woman in uniform tonight has not only had to prove herself physically, mentally, and professionally, she's also had to overcome outdated perceptions and hidden barriers to claim a rightful place in this?life. Being a woman in this field means training for years to meet the same physical demands, mastering tools and tactics without always being given the benefit of the doubt, and carrying the mental weight of representing something bigger than yourself: being a role model for the next generation.

“And yet, you persist. Women bring an invaluable perspective to this profession. You bring empathy, communication, and collaborative problem-solving to high-pressure situations. These qualities don't just complement the work. They are essential to it. You are defining what leadership, strength, and service looks like. The more women we see in emergency services, the more normal it becomes, the more doors open, the more barriers fall. To Fatemeh Hajjari, and Brienne Nelson, congratulations. Your success has brought you here tonight, proudly wearing the firefighters' uniform and joining the esteemed Central York Fire Services family. You have trained relentlessly, physically and mentally, and now you step forward to answer the call of duty. When our community is in need, when fear or tragedy strikes, it will be you who we turn to. You are now part of an elite crew and you are truly leaders.”

The milestone of an all-female graduating class was also recognized by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who said the newest recruits “have chosen to stand at the frontlines of public safety, to be the calm in the chaos, to be there in the hardest, most vulnerable moments people will ever face, and this isn't something just anyone can do.”

“It takes strength, it takes resilience, and, most importantly, it takes heart,” he said. “This year's graduating class brings a remarkable range of experience. Some of you serve as paramedics, others come from engineering, and even the military. You've been tested, you've made tough decisions under pressure, and you've supported others in moments of real need. And that experience matters. It will shape how you serve, it will make your crew stronger, and it will make our community safer.”

“We are celebrating the full group of women recruits. Now this isn't just worth recognizing, it's worth celebrating, because it speaks to the incredible leadership, talent, and drive that women continue to bring to the fire service. It sends a powerful message to young people watching, to future recruits, and to everyone in our community that this profession is open, inclusive, and evolving. To each of you graduating tonight, congratulations. You earned your place in the department. You showed commitment, grit, and determination. And now you carry forward the tradition of service that holds deep meaning in our community.”

New recruit Brienne Nelson was selected Valedictorian of the Class of 2025.

As such, she spoke on behalf of herself and her fellow recruits.

“Twelve weeks ago, Nicole, Fatemeh, and I walked through these doors with wide eyes, big smiles, and eager to learn,” she said. “Nicole's bubbly and determined nature kept us energized. Fatemeh's quiet intensity and dry humour kept us grounded. It did not take long for me to realize that these women did not only make this journey incredibly special, but that we would be friends for life. Our class was unique as three women with no previous professional firefighting experience. What we did have was pride and resilience with something to prove. We also had a lot of fun – so much so, that we stayed an extra four weeks! To our incredible training officers, thank you.”

**By Brock Weir**