

## Long-time firefighter retires after more than 30 years serving the community he loves



An air raid siren is a sound often associated with war, but life-long Aurora resident Brad Humfryes can still hear the triple-barrelled whistle of the similar-sounding blare blasting across Aurora as he played in the yard of Wells Street Public School.

In this case, however, the booming cacophony was to summon local volunteer firefighters to a call.

While the sound may have been one many Aurorans dreaded, it was a different story for Humfryes. Instead, it captured his imagination and 'sparked' a love for serving others — one which has stood Aurora in good stead for a better part of four decades as Humfryes worked to answer the call for the community he loves.

This dedication, however, came to a close this past month as Humfryes hung up his fire helmet for the very last time.

'I've done 33 years in total and I'll tell you, the toughest part is one out of every four nights you're away from home,' he tells *The Auroran*. 'I'm happy to retire and I'm retiring happy.'

Humfryes first joined what was then the Aurora Fire Department in 1991, when the department was still largely comprised of volunteer firefighters. The move came after time at university where he studied urban planning, but the early seeds of a passion to serve the community in which he was raised were soon to germinate.

'When I attended Wells Street School, from the top floor you could see the fire station when it was on Victoria Street, and when you're in class, playing at recess, that [siren] would go off and my eyes would just go across the window to the fire station to see the trucks roll in — I remember that as clear as day, and that had to have been in Grade 1. From when I was just a little kid, my first word was 'truck' and I'm a truck guy through and through. Firetrucks just caught my eye from when I was a little kid — just the lights, siren, and shiny red paint, just like a lot of little kids — but it just stuck with me forever.'

While other kids might have been playing board games like Monopoly, Pay Day, and Concentration, Humfryes was focused on playing *Emergency!*, a board game based on the popular 1970s medical drama, focused on firefighters in Los Angeles — a game which he counts as a prized possession to this day.

He vividly recalls watching some of Aurora's biggest and most impactful fires of the 1970s and 80s from afar, including one large-scale industrial fire at the end of Dunning Avenue — the street of his childhood home, where he still lives today with his wife,

former Aurora councillor Sandra Humfryes.

?I remember watching that fire until midnight and I was amazed when I got up the next morning and the guys were still at the end of the road fighting the same fire,? he recalls. ?I followed the new trucks as they came in over the years and it was always on my mind. I got an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Geography and honestly planned to go into some kind of urban planning, but it just didn't work out. I graduated in 1989 and as I cut grass (as a seasonal job) I got to know more guys around Town who were on the Fire Department and the best part of working for myself was I was always available just cutting grass in Town. They said that [the Department] would like to have someone who was self-employed and always available to volunteer.?

As a volunteer member, then a full-fledged member of the Aurora Fire Department and the subsequent Central York Fire Services following the merger of Aurora and Newmarket's respective fire services in 2002, he says he ?learned I could do a lot more than I ever thought I could do, physically.?

?In Grade 9, I was 92 pounds ? I was just a little kid and I just never thought I could be a firefighter,? he says with a laugh.

?I just walked in as a guy off the street, went to a few training nights and then got introduced into the world of firefighting. We did a six-week training session, very basic training, and then I was lucky enough to be chosen as one of the successful applicants. For six years, I was basically first for any call. It was so much fun and so exciting I never left Aurora because I didn't want to miss a call in those hours.

?I got to live the dream, simple as that. The most important part for me is I always wanted to be in my hometown. Once I got there, I never had any interest in any other fire departments ? I just wanted to be in my hometown. There is tragedy and stuff involved, but it is a great feeling being involved in your hometown and on the frontline ? and being a frontline firefighter in your hometown is everything I ever thought of as a kid growing up.?

**By Brock Weir**