



MEDIA RELEASE

DAUGHTERS TO RUN IN DAD'S FOOTSTEPS AT JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

When Lori and Taryn Ahern compete at the Victorian urban junior fire brigade championships in Warrnambool on February 24-25, their father Matt will be watching with special pride.

The sisters will be following in Matt's footsteps which saw him rise from a junior who liked running events to a fire fighting professional and volunteer.

Nearly 500 juniors from 68 teams will take part in the championships coordinated by Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) in conjunction with the CFA.

Matt started as a junior at The Basin 34 years ago when he was 11. He stayed with the brigade for 31 years, rising to the role of volunteer captain and then gaining employment with CFA as a Community Education Coordinator.

"Juniors really kicked off my senior involvement," he said. "My father was a member of the brigade at the time and they'd just started juniors so it was it was an interest for me."

That interest turned into a life-long love of serving and protecting the community as a volunteer firefighter.

At the end of 2016 Matt was transferred from the CFA District 13 Lilydale office to Seymour District 12 Headquarters and his family relocated to Broadford.

Lori, 14, had started with the junior competition team at The Basin and wanted to keep going. Taryn, 12, wasn't initially interested but soon got into the swing of it when they joined at Seymour.

On February 24-25 Taryn will be competing in her first VFBV State Urban Junior Championships; it will be Lori's third event but her first with Seymour.

The sisters go to school in Broadford and catch the train to Seymour for their weekly training night.

Matt remains a strong advocate for junior CFA teams. "Every brigade should have a junior brigade," he said. "It's the lifeblood of a brigade."

About five of Matt's fellow juniors from The Basin went on to become CFA career staff and others became trained firefighting volunteers.

"The junior competitions get kids interested and if you can keep them interested they progress well into the senior ranks," he said.

"It develops a bit of community spirit which I think we're missing these days. Being involved in a volunteer organisation instils a spirit of giving back to your communities."

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said junior brigades and the championships were the best way for young people to become engaged and learn practical skills before being old enough to attend fires.

"The VFBV State Urban Junior Championships can set young people on a pathway to serve their communities," Mr Ford said.

"They encourage family participation and help to instil a sense of community service and volunteerism in young people while raising the importance of local fire brigades," Mr Ford said.

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