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MEDIA RELEASE

GRANDFATHER RETURNS TO COACH MOE JUNIOR CFA BRIGADE

As a little kid Paddy Walsh used to wander around to the fire brigade training track and watch the CFA volunteers and junior brigade members complete their drills.

He was particularly impressed by how they'd dash up a ladder at fast speed, honing their skills to be ready to tackle any type of blaze.

In the mid-1970s Paddy was asked by his football captain if he'd like to have a go at running with the Moe Fire Brigade. The offer immediately sparked his interest and it turned into an affiliation that lasts until today.

"I live not far from the track in Moe and used to go and watch them train when I was a little kid," Paddy, now nearly 68, recalls.

"It's was always in my mind that I'd love to run up the ladder."

After taking up his captain's offer, Paddy later became a state champion in the ladder event and went on to become a long-term volunteer firefighter.

This year Paddy has returned to coach the Moe junior brigade at the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) State Urban Junior Championships in Warrnambool on February 24-25. Sixty eight teams from across Victoria will take part in the annual event.

The championships will be particularly close to Paddy's heart with four of his grandchildren competing.

Paddy was followed by his daughter Kerry and sons Leon, Paul, Brian, and Mark who ran with both juniors and seniors at Moe. Now their children; Liam 16, Paddy 15, Rylie 14 and Cooper 11 are running with the juniors to keep the tradition going. Brian expects to add two more grandchildren to the squad next year.

While the competition is fun for the children, it also has an important community and safety undertone.

“We try to give them the basic skills and build teamwork and hopefully encourage them to go on and volunteer,” Paddy said.

“It’s the greatest thing of all time. It’s a team sport and it makes a team person of them and they end up being community-minded.”

Paddy joined his fellow volunteers attending hundreds of calls over the years. “There have been some terrible incidents; probably the biggest one was when the cotton mill caught fire.”

“That’s why we encourage young people to join and go on to do the professional training to become volunteers.”

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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