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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **SWAN HILL VOLUNTEER GEARING UP FOR THE FUTURE**

Swan Hill Fire Brigade is gearing up for the future with a growing junior brigade and young members advancing through the ranks.

Former junior member Monique Bruton, 18, is one of those to step up; advancing this year from juniors to become a trained volunteer

Monique has embraced the new challenge, attending up to 90 incidents in the first five months as a trained volunteer.

She's also taken on the responsibility of assistant coach for the junior brigade running team.

The junior brigade competed successfully at the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) State Urban Junior Championships in Warrnambool, winning third place in the under 14 section and sixth over both under 14 and 17 categories.

Under 14 competitor George Smith won the one person Marshall event with a personal best time and he was part of the two-person and four person teams that finished second and third.

VFBV District 18 president and brigade member and junior coach Harold Jochs said the junior brigade was inspiring young local people to become trained volunteers.

Mr Jochs said Monique was "as keen as mustard". "She's probably one of our top responders to incidents when the fire siren goes," he said.

Monique joined the juniors about four years ago, following her younger sister Kadisha.

"I loved it," she said. "Meeting new people was the best part and then working my way up to the seniors and doing the training to be involved in fighting fires," she said.

Monique has completed her wildfire training course, and more recently upgraded her skills to attend incidents on the brigade's new pumper. "The training has been very good so I'm confident but if I have any question everyone is happy to help."

She continued training last year while studying Year 12 and has now attended incidents ranging from grass fires and structure fires to car accidents. "It helps that I live around the corner only 20 seconds from the station," she said.

Monique also works at the Coles supermarket where her mother Kylie Burney is manager. She encouraged her mother to become a volunteer and they now both respond to incidents.

"That makes it a lot easier and Coles are really good supporting firefighters," Monique said.

Monique is planning promotional activities to encourage more young people to join the brigade. She's also encouraging more joint activities between junior and senior brigades.

"I wasn't from a fire-fighting family," she said. "I just joined the junior brigade and stepped up and got involved."

Monique will study a Diploma of Nursing this year at SuniTAFE's Swan Hill campus.

Three under 17s have moved up to senior volunteer ranks this year.

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

"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 described diversity as an important facet of volunteer firefighting. "When our CFA volunteers are saving your property or helping in a time of need, you don't care whether we're male or female, paid or volunteer, or what our race, religion or sexuality we might be; the thing you take comfort in is that we are there, doing what needs to be done backed by our experience, training, professionalism and community compassion."

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