



May, 2017

MEDIA RELEASE

BAIRNSDALE TO CELEBRATE CFA STATION'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Bairnsdale CFA volunteers will celebrate their fire station's 90th anniversary on May 27, rekindling a lot of fond memories for veteran member Graeme East.

A volunteer for about 50 years, Mr East has been captain of the brigade and is the current chairman. He's also the District 11 president.

Mr East started as a junior member when a friend's father, who happened to be the brigade captain, suggested the boys needed a bit of discipline.

"He sent us to the brigade...I think it worked," he joked.

When Mr East, 65, graduated from juniors into senior firefighting ranks, things were far different to today's highly trained professional volunteers able to respond whenever and wherever they are needed.

"I go back to when we had bells in the houses and they'd ring and we'd race to the station to find out what the call was about; then we went to phones and now our paging system.

"It's come a long way and become very professional."

The Bairnsdale brigade will this year respond to nearly 300 calls for help. "When I was captain in 2000 we did about 100 a year," Mr East said. "A lot of the increase is because of smoke detector alarms. People hear the alarms and call the brigade before it gets too bad. Smoke detectors have saved a lot of houses."

The brigade has kept up with the demand. "We have a lot of younger members who are keen to get out and do all the training," Mr East said.

"We have people wanting to volunteer all the time which is good because we don't want to lose the community aspect of life. It's good for young people and for the community."

Mr East has been part of a strong brigade response to major fires and many road accidents and has never lost his interest in volunteering.

Attending the 90th anniversary celebrations will be a time to reflect on the essential service volunteers have provided for decades.

The brigade hopes to relocate in the next five years to a new site shared with the ambulance service and SES, but in the meantime the volunteers will celebrate with an afternoon tea on May 27.

“It’s where most of us who’ve been around for a long time started,” Mr East said. “There are a lot of good memories.”

For a lad who was introduced to the brigade for a bit of discipline, he’s sure become an integral part of a broad volunteer family.

But it might have taken a while for the discipline to kick in. “I remember they built a residence for the station keeper next to the station. As a junior we used to climb the rafters as they were building the house. There are a lot of good memories.”

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said volunteers are essential to public safety and provide a professional service that is effective and affordable.

“Our dedicated volunteers, like the Bairnsdale brigade, are continuing a great Australian tradition that is well respected in our communities,” Mr Ford said.

Mr Ford said volunteers are part of the fabric of society and contribute to community resilience.

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