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Camp Molly inspires future firefighters through hands-on experiences

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Camp Molly finished up in Orangeville with strong participation, high engagement and a growing number of young people now considering careers in the fire service.

From July 2 to 5, dozens of female and non-binary youth campers came to the Orangeville Fire Hall to participate in Camp Molly, a firefighter camp meant to introduce them to the basics of the trade.

According to Orangeville Fire Chief John Snider, the camp exceeded expectations despite challenging weather, with 35 female and non-binary campers participating alongside approximately 25 to 30 volunteers and instructors.

?I'd say it was a great success,? he said. ?Everything went incredibly well. The campers were phenomenal. We worked our way through the heat and the challenging weather, but I think that helped bring all the girls and the campers together.?

Camper Meredith Beattie said the experience was positive, filled with learning and support.

?Camp Molly provided such an empowering and rewarding experience,? she said. ?Learning from so many strong women who shared their knowledge was inspiring. Every day was filled with hands-on training, and I enjoyed hearing about the related professions of the fire service. The staff and volunteers were super welcoming and supportive and they pushed me to challenge myself in all evolutions.?

While extreme heat forced organizers to adapt by adding cooling stations, fans and extra hydration breaks, Snider said safety remained the top priority, and campers handled themselves well.

Throughout the camp, participants rotated through a wide variety of practical and educational stations designed to showcase the many roles within emergency services.

Activities included operating fire hoses and hydrants, ladder work, auto extrication, donning firefighting gear and self-contained breathing apparatus, forcible entry exercises, fire investigation, emergency medical response with Dufferin County Paramedic Service, public education and emergency communications.

The goal, Snider said, was to expose campers to far more than the traditional image of firefighters, highlighting the many career opportunities in prevention, inspections, dispatch, and other support roles.

?That's what the whole camp was about, is opening eyes to things that aren't maybe the Hollywood version of firefighters,? he said. ?That concerns the inspections and prevention and the dispatch and more. There's a lot of different opportunities that aren't on a fire truck in the fire service.?

Representatives from the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ministry of Transportation also participated, providing campers with additional insight into careers in public safety.

Snider said one of the most rewarding aspects of the camp was watching participants grow in confidence throughout the program.

?It's heartwarming to see the change over time,? he said. ?We first started off with their fitting for bunker gear on Tuesday night, and there were a lot of quiet, intimidated and nervous campers, but they just continued to grow. From being afraid to talk to working

great in a group, working with the instructors and their teammates, and all that stuff, it was just really great to see.?

The experience appears to have had a lasting impact, with several campers already planning to pursue careers in firefighting and some enrolling in fire pre-service college programs this fall.

The camp was also offered free of charge thanks to extensive community support. Snider credited the Ontario Fire Academy's $10,000 donation, along with contributions from Firehouse Subs, Dufferin Emergency Management, local grocery stores, Starbucks, Tim Hortons and many other businesses that donated meals, supplies and refreshments throughout the event.

Although Camp Molly is expected to rotate to another community before eventually returning to Orangeville, Snider said the local fire service remains committed to supporting the program in the future.

To learn more about Camp Molly, go to: campmolly.ca