

Immersive female firefighting camp coming to Dufferin County

By Joshua Drakes, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Camp Molly is set to bring an intensive, hands-on firefighting experience to girls and non-binary individuals aged 15 to 18, offering a rare inside look at the modern fire service and the many careers within it.

Hosted by Orangeville Fire in partnership with the provincial Camp Molly program, the four-day camp is designed to build skills, confidence, and awareness of first responder roles, while helping young women envision themselves in positions traditionally dominated by men.

Firefighter Emily Marfleet, who is coordinating the camp, said it will serve as an introductory experience for attendees.

‘We’re hosting firefighting education for girls 15 to 18 years old, just to kind of give them an idea of what the fire service is like,’ she said. ‘They’ll meet and see mentors that are already in the fire service, in a way that helps them see themselves in the service as well. They’ll get a front row seat to see what being a first responder is like.’

The camp’s mission is twofold. First, it aims to expose participants to the full breadth of the fire and emergency services world, far beyond the stereotypical Hollywood image of riding a fire truck to a blaze.

Second, it is intended to develop leadership, teamwork, and personal resilience that will serve the girls whether or not they ultimately choose a career in emergency services.

‘We’re going to take them through all different kinds of firefighting skills, and they can kind of learn on that, do some team building, some networking, and really get a chance to grow themselves,’ Marfleet said. ‘They get to try out all the different avenues that are available to them.’

Attendees can expect a diverse and packed schedule.

Planned activities include CPR and medical training with paramedics, an introduction to ambulance operations, and exposure to dispatch and communications in emergency response. Participants will explore fire prevention and investigation, including examining burn cells to see how fires start, spread, and are analyzed after the fact.

Marfleet said they will also tackle core firefighting skills, including auto extrication, search and rescue, nozzle handling, and technical demonstrations.

‘We’re setting up and demonstrating burn cells so that they can see what a fire looks like and what they’re looking for during the investigation after,’ she said. ‘Physical demonstrations like that can really help teach them what to look for and just how quickly a fire can spread.’

Public education is part of the curriculum as well, with campers collaborating on a presentation, reinforcing both communication skills and fire safety knowledge.

Camp Molly in Orangeville is being delivered free of charge, with capacity for 35 participants. Interest has been strong, drawing applicants from Orangeville, Dufferin County, and beyond, with local sponsors helping cover meals and operational costs to keep the program accessible.

For those who attend all four days and are still very interested in pursuing a career in emergency services, Orangeville Fire Chief John Snider said that pathways will be available from Camp Molly onwards for those interested, thanks to local partners.

‘We’re expecting to be looking for volunteer firefighters again next year, as there’s a few vacancies coming up,’ he said. ‘At the end of the day, you don’t have to be on the hose or on the fire truck. There’s a number of careers that don’t involve the fire trucks that are great opportunities for everyone to explore.’

‘We have a private career college nearby called the Ontario Fire Academy, which is a great local opportunity to get the education and move into those other pathways. There is a lot to explore and a lot of variety there.’

Day to day, Orangeville Fire responds primarily to medical calls, alarm activations, motor vehicle collisions, and structure fires, while also continuing to expand its capabilities, such as training for technical and rope rescues to meet local risks.

Public education and fire prevention are central pillars of its mission, making Camp Molly a natural extension of the department’s commitment to community safety and to fostering a more diverse, future-ready fire service.

Camp Molly is set to serve as a unique opportunity for girls and non-binary individuals to explore their career interests in a safe, controlled environment, with the guidance of industry professionals and emergency service experts as they see real, hands-on demonstrations and education.

Colleen Adams, training officer with the Orangeville Fire Department, said that regardless of whether they continue down that path afterward, the camp aims to leave them more confident, more connected and more experienced.

‘Even if they decide that they don’t want to do this, it’s another way to meet other people,’ she said. ‘It is a team-based environment. They will be able to push themselves, ultimately, this camp is going to give a lot of girls the opportunity to grow.’

Female residents of Dufferin County between 15 and 18 are encouraged to register for Camp Molly, if interested in a career related to fire services.

To register, volunteer or learn more, go to www.campmolly.ca.