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New fire chief starts role at Shelburne Fire Department

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Shelburne has welcomed a new Fire Chief to the Shelburne and District Fire Department (SDFD) as the Fire Board hires veteran firefighter David Pratt to take leadership of local fire services.

?I'm very excited to take on the role and from what I've been able to gather in my short time, the staff here are a very dedicated and well-trained group,? said Pratt speaking with the Free Press. ?It's been very busy, but exciting to be here and I'm looking forward to learning a lot and progressing the fire department.?

Pratt is stepping into the role as Shelburne's third full-time fire chief, an experience that is not unknown to him, having previously served in the position at three other fire departments.

A more than 25-year veteran, Pratt started his career in firefighting in 1998 as a volunteer at the Halton Hills Fire Department in Acton, before taking a full-time position in 2000.

?There was a sign outside the station that said they were looking for volunteer firefighters and I thought what a great way to meet people,? recalled Pratt. ?Back then we did everything. I worked in communications in the call center, I worked as a fire prevention officer, a public educator, trainer, and when the tones went off; as a first responder to incidents. I got educated in every aspect about the fire department very early on.?

After becoming a full-time firefighter, Pratt stayed with the Town of Halton until 2008 before moving to the City of Milton Fire Department, where he served eight years as deputy fire chief and two years as fire chief.

Since 2020, Pratt has held various positions at fire departments across the province and country including deputy fire marshal in Nunavut, deputy fire chief in North Battleford Saskatchewan and deputy fire chief as well as fire chief in Kenora, Ont.

?I've been around a while and had a few stops on the way; it's the best job in the world. I love the fire services and the people in it,? said Pratt.

While having decades of experience in volunteer-based fire departments, one major aspect of the Shelburne and District Fire Department that differs from Pratt's previous positions is the fact that the local department is operated by a fire board.

The Shelburne and District Fire Department is a volunteer-based department that serves the communities of Amaranth, Melancthon, Mono, Mulmur and Shelburne. The department consists of one full-time fire chief, one volunteer deputy fire chief and 28 volunteer firefighters.

The fire department is operated by the Shelburne District Fire Board, which is made up of two members from each of the surrounding communities for a total of 10 members.

?Shelburne is quite a unique experience for me because you report to a fire board... I'm used to municipal government reporting to the CAO, mayor and council. We're also in a county where the various municipalities are serviced by seven different fire departments,? said Pratt. ?There's certainly some opportunity to learn and be involved in thing I've never been involved in.?

As he takes over as fire chief, Pratt said his main priorities in the coming months will be focused on administrative processes, including making sure the staff and volunteers have up-to-date training and certification in line with the provincial mandates. He'll

also be working with the surrounding municipalities and other fire chiefs to update and establish regulating bylaws.

Pratt will also continue with the local department's public safety education efforts.

?I think my knowledge, skills and abilities that I have in my history will align with the services we provide here,? said Pratt. ?Public education is the first line of defense and if you can get out and educate the public to prevent bad things from happening, that's every fire chief's goal.?

Pratt officially took over as the new Fire Chief of the Shelburne and District Fire Department on Sept. 23.