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MEDIA RELEASE

FIRE BRIGADE HELPS RURAL COMMUNITY UNITE

Strathmerton might be a small community of only 900 people, but when it comes to volunteering with the local fire brigade it shows a big heart.

The brigade, from near Cobram north of Shepparton, has about 80 members, including 18 juniors and brigade and life members, with up to 40 active volunteer firefighters.

On April 7-8 at the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) state rural championships in Warrnambool, the brigade will show its strength in numbers, fielding six senior and four junior teams.

It is the highest number of teams any rural Victorian brigade has fielded in memory and one of the coaches and first lieutenant, Billy Logie, says it all stems from family involvement.

“Our secret is that we have a lot of families running together,” Billy said. “My wife and three daughters are all running and four or five other families are all running, which is great.”

“We socialise together and we’re going to Warrnambool together and will stay there for the week.”

While there is a fun and competitive side to the championships, they also serve a serious purpose as a breeding ground for future volunteer firefighters.

“The running comps are a fun and safe environment for young people to become familiar with what we do on as volunteer firefighters,” Billy said. “The events are what we do on the fire ground and they teach kids about responsibility and respect for it.”

“Probably half the juniors have completed their minimal skills training and become active firefighters once they turned 16.”

The brigade is also involved in the Cobram Secondary Collage Duke of Edinburgh program which teaches students minimum wildfire skills. At least six have gone on to join the brigade.

As membership has grown, so have the brigade's responsibilities. The volunteers attend about 100 turnouts each year, mainly grass and scrub fires. This has almost doubled this decade.

With several members living near the station, the brigade has exceptionally good response times – usually getting the truck out in less than four minutes.

This has led the brigade to be added to the Cobram structure response program.

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

“The VFBV state championships can set young people on a pathway to serve their communities,” Mr Ford said.

“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,” he added.

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