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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **LIFE MEMBERSHIP HONOURS CFA VOLUNTEER'S 50 YEARS**

When Fred Grove became a CFA volunteer in November 1966, many rural brigades relied on farmer's trucks to carry water to fires.

At that time training for volunteers usually consisted of a few older members at a burn-off showing new recruits how to handle a hose and read fire behaviour.

In more than 50 years Fred has seen a total transformation of volunteer fire services into a professional organisation with strict training and safety protocols and a vastly expanded role in protecting the community.

Fred's dedicated contribution to the Connewarre and Lara CFA brigades and to Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria has been honoured with a VFBV life membership.

Although his health no longer allows the 65-year-old to attend incidents, Fred remains a member of the Lara brigade and a state councillor with the VFBV.

"I'll endeavour to remain active with the association until my body says otherwise," he said. "It's something I still enjoy and it keeps my mind active."

With more than 1000 incidents to his credit, including leading strike teams to major bushfires in Gippsland, New South Wales and South Australia, Fred has no doubt about the important role of volunteer firefighters.

"The average firefighter is much more professional compared to when I started," he said.

"Things have changed so much in the training and safety aspect of firefighting, much to the betterment of our people. It's so busy; volunteers go to so many different emergency response situations and there's much more emphasis on appropriate training to cover all the necessary skills."

Fred followed in his father's footsteps to become a volunteer with Connewarre, near Barwon Heads. "I worked on my family's dairy farm; joining the local fire brigade was part of the community involvement back in those days."

“When I joined in 1966 Connewarre had just been presented with an old hand-me-down Austin tanker; prior to that they relied on flatbed farmer’s trucks and they would slide a tank and pump on the back.”

After leaving the farm to join the police force, Fred later joined the Lara brigade.

He’s unsure how many incidents he attended, but estimates it to be well in excess of 1000.

“It’s not just fires; there were gas leaks, car accidents and kids stuck in play equipment. We even had one or two cats up a tree; most would be happy to come down on their own volition but some people panic a bit.”

A fatal gas leak at a Geelong refinery stays in his memory as a frightening ordeal and he described the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 as a “hellish day”.

“Ash Wednesday was surreal. I was at work as a police officer in Williamstown so I was removed from it, but that made it all the more difficult.”

Fred was captain of the Lara brigade for 10 years, a role he describes as a great responsibility in a local community, and brigade delegate, district council president and state councillor for VFBV.

“What I’ve really enjoyed is the good comradery and the chance to contribute to the community,” he said.

Founded in 1939, the Lara CFA Brigade is a 100 per cent volunteer brigade with about 60 members who respond to about 400 calls a year, including house and factory fires, hazardous materials incidents, road accidents and bushfires.

Lara volunteers provide professional fire services to householders, commercial premises, industry, and significant infrastructure such as Avalon airport and Barwon, Karreenga and Marngoneet prisons.

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