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MEDIA RELEASE

VOLUNTEERING FROM THE START IN WODONGA

There have been a lot of volunteer family dynasties in the CFA, but the Coyle family of Wodonga can claim to be there from the start.

And Ross Coyle, the current Wodonga West brigade captain and a 30-year volunteer veteran, says there are many more years to come.

Ross' grandfather George, still alive and turning 103 in July, was a charter member of the Wodonga Rural CFA brigade. Ross' father Colin was captain for 20 years and group officer for 12 years and now his daughters Lauren and Aleisha and wife Jan are following suit.

Son, Toby 10, can't wait till he turns 11 to join the junior squad.

"It may have started as self-preservation back in the day, but it becomes part of the fabric of who you are and what you enjoy doing for the community," Ross said.

Ross, a generational beef and sheep farmer, started riding around in the fire truck with his father on school holidays and signed up as a junior at 13.

"I was on the back of a truck as soon as I was allowed to be," he said.

The 100 per cent volunteer brigade has undergone significant changes in the past three decades, and has emerged with a revitalised outlook over the past year.

"When I started we were a rural brigade only doing a handful of calls per year," Ross said. "Now we do between 250 and 300 calls per year and we've gone from strength to strength to keep up with demand. Most of our calls are supporting the integrated station at Wodonga. We have a good relationship and support each other."

The brigade moved into a new station last year. "Having moved from a tin shed to a new station has really changed the brigade," Ross said. "We've had a huge surge in female and non-operational members and we've got a junior brigade going really strongly."

Both junior and senior teams won conduct and discipline awards at the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria rural championships this year. "That's a credit to the quality of people we have in the brigade," Ross said.

“The strength of the brigade is the people around you. We’re very professional and skilled to our risk profile.”

Ross was on the CFA Board for six years before it was sacked last year by the State Government during an ongoing EBA dispute.

He says “the Board did what it had to do” in the dispute and he has no regrets. “It was one of the highlights of my CFA career to represent volunteers on the CFA Board, but I always felt the most personally rewarding work I do is at the local level.”

Ross now concentrates on his volunteer role and he hopes the CFA can continue to provide an efficient and economical service to Victorians. “Our brigade has a bright future and our family will continue. My children are now members and my wife is now a junior leader and finding how it gets under your skin.”

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said volunteers are essential to public safety and provide a professional service that is effective and affordable.

“Our dedicated volunteers are continuing a great Australian tradition that is well respected in our communities,” Mr Ford said.

Mr Ford said volunteers are part of the fabric of society and contribute to community resilience.

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