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MEDIA RELEASE

VETERAN VOLUNTEERS RECEIVE LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

One of John Mahony's most cherished memories of nearly 50 years of firefighting centres on a pat on the back from a Grampians volunteer after they'd contained a big bushfire at Framlingham.

For his old mate Kelvin Boyle fighting fires alongside his father Jack sticks at the top of his memory.

The two volunteers have been rewarded for their long-serving, dedicated and professional service with CFA life memberships.

Mr Boyle officially joined the Mepunga fire brigade when he turned 16 in the 1950s, but before that he'd been working alongside his Dad whenever a fire broke out.

Now 80, he's still actively involved in CFA group communications.

Likewise Mr Mahony volunteered for the Cudgee brigade in 1969 when he was 16 and has been involved ever since. In the past two months he's been to six different incidents.

Both Mr Boyle and Mr Mahony have previously received brigade and Hopkins Curdies group life memberships and say they are honoured by the latest CFA recognition.

Kelvin has been fighting fires since he was nine - 71 years ago.

"I went to my first fire with my father when I was nine," Kelvin said. "I remember lightning struck a fence and lit a fire in seven places."

A few years later he was again alongside his father as they battled a major bushfire at Naringal. "It went on for days," he said. "When it came into the open out of the bush we just whacked it out with bags."

Fire fighting has transformed since those days where locals joined the brigade and watched and learned.

"We didn't have a truck in those days, now there's a building with all the mod-cons and it's very professional with training, protective gear and advanced communications," Mr Boyle said.

Mr Boyle continues to go to brigade and group meetings and plays an important role with group communications. He has held various brigade and group officer roles and has been a local Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) delegate for many years.

Mr Mahony joined in 1969. "It was the thing to do when you're 16. I went to my first meeting in 1970 and got the job as secretary. I did that for about 15 years and then took on group secretary for 22 years." He has also held various brigade and group roles and is VFBV District 5 senior vice president.

He enjoys remaining a dedicated part of a broader team providing professional firefighting services across the state.

"We're improving all the time," he said. "We're always communicating and trying to do our best."

Both life members have been involved in strike teams, joining forces with fellow volunteers to help stop big fires from doing major damage, including Black Saturday, the Grampians and at many other incidents.

They're also enjoyed the support of brigades from around the state at devastating local disasters such as Ash Wednesday in 1983 and more recent Framlingham bushfires.

"On the strike teams you go away and don't think much of it, but at the Fram fire I went there the next morning and ran into a volunteer from the Grampians," Mr Mahony said.

"It was so nice to have those blokes there working all night; they stopped that fire from jumping the road. We're all part of a team; it's not that long since we've been up to the Grampians helping them."

Mr Boyle and Mr Mahony say they are honoured by the CFA life memberships but didn't set out looking for such recognition.

"You don't do it for awards but it's a nice honour," Mr Boyle said.

"You never think of awards; you just go and do what you've got to do," Mr Mahony added.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said the professional contribution of volunteers like John Mahony and Kelvin Boyle reflected the evolving capacity of brigades to deal with changing community risks.

"Our volunteers provide about \$1 billion worth of service each year and contribute to the CFA's well-established ability to mobilise huge numbers of highly trained and experienced volunteers to deal with major incidents," he said.

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