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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **FIREFIGHTING A CAREER AND VOLUNTEER PASSION FOR WILLOW GROVE CAPTAIN**

Anthony Schultz became a junior CFA member to run in competitions when he was 11.

Thirty five years later he's still competing and winning events and has turned his passion for firefighting into a career and a dedicated volunteer commitment.

The Willow Grove CFA rural brigade captain says volunteering is part of what rural communities do to help out.

"It brings the community together," he said. "The Lions, the footy club – we all help one another – it's part of living in a rural community."

His father, Ron Schultz from Benalla, was president of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria's predecessor and was on the board of the CFA.

Anthony joined as soon as he turned 11. "I loved the running side of it in the competition," he said. "That's where most of my drive came from when I was in the juniors and it just continued on from there."

He still competes. Although he admits the body is not as willing as it used to be, last year he won three gold, three silver and a bronze in swimming events at the Australasian Police and Emergency Services Games.

The Willow Grove volunteer brigade responds to about 30 calls each year, mostly grass and structure fires, and has added to the CFA's surge capacity to respond to major incidents across the region and state.

"We have about 50 people on the books and about 20 active members," Anthony said. "A lot of our volunteers are dairy farmers and we have enough to call on when needed."

After starting at Benalla alongside his father, Anthony was a member of Upwey and Belgrave before moving to Gippsland to work as a firefighter for the Yallourn Power Station.

"I do it as a career and as a volunteer; I guess it shows how much I love it," he said.

His eldest son Harrison is now in the juniors in Willow Grove and Anthony expects his younger children will also catch the bug.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria CEO Andrew Ford said volunteers play a vital role in developing community connections, capacity and resilience.

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

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

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