

## **PAINT LAKE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT HISTORY**

**This is a descriptive history of a Volunteer Fire Department, and desire to make an application for a Federal or Provincial Grant to extend the fire hall built in 2004 by a group of dedicated people in Paint Lake Provincial Park.**

**The Paint Lake Volunteer Fire Department Inc. was formed in 1995 by a group of cottagers after the development of five new blocks of cottage lots along Paint and Liz Lakes by the Lakefront Co-op Inc. A road was then built to connect these and the existing cottages to highway 375 directly. The old road around Liz Lake was abandoned, due to beavers plugging culverts and washouts. Previous structural fires had made cottager owners aware that at best, it would take a truck and crew from Thompson a minimum of a half hour to action a cottage fire at Paint Lake, if they were not otherwise deployed. The combined real estate values of cottages in addition to the Manitoba Natural Resources Buildings of bunk houses; garage; warehouse; campground facilities; largest boat marina in Manitoba and a Resort with restaurant/bar/store, and rental cabins all needed a faster response time than one half hour for adequate fire protection. In addition, the parking lots and campgrounds were often full to capacity on a typical summer weekend. Helitac fire fighters were untrained in structural fire fighting, and often could be engaged in wildfire suppression elsewhere, and the crews were seasonal only. With this in mind, a concerned group of cottagers formed the Paint Lake Volunteer Fire Department Inc. in 1995.**

**Setting Lake Cottagers had formed a similar group, so the first step was to study their operation. In addition, Falcon Lake had a volunteer fire department and Chief Mason was helpful with suggestions. The issue of funding was an enormous hurdle, since no grants or financial assistance were available from any level of government at that time, because we lived in a Provincial Park. The fact that the Trans Canada Highway ran past Falcon Lake provided them with funding because of the need for a full time ambulance crew to cover the long distances between communities along Highway 1. This meant that the Ontario Provincial Government shared in the funding of their Fire Hall.**

**After many letters and phone calls in the 1990's and visits to numerous government branches, and granting organizations, it was then apparent that any funding for a Paint Lake Fire Hall would have to be done through local efforts, only.**

**The Paint Lake Search and Rescue (PLSAR) organization, who shared members in common with the PLVFD, combined with the PLVFD to jointly fundraise. The first attempt was a raffle, which wasn't a high profit activity. A better venue was discussed jointly between the two groups and the idea of a "Wild Boar Night" featuring a full banquet of roast wild boar; smoked Arctic char; turkey; appetizers; salads and desserts; and all the trimmings, followed by dancing and silent auctions would be more successful. Two of these were held at what was then called the Paint Lake Marina, and were sold out, and successful. But, due to seating limitations, ticket numbers were limited, so five more of these events were held at the larger St. Joseph's Hall in Thompson. All these events were sold out! The various businesses and crafters that donated prizes for the silent auctions deserve a lot of thanks, but**

especially the wives of both the PLVFD and the PLSAR who made the appetizers; desserts and salads that made tickets to this event so popular, really deserve a lot of the gratitude for their work skills.

The initial equipment purchases were portable 4 stroke Honda pumps, followed each year by more pumps, which were located in barrels with fuel; hose and ice augers at strategic locations along the park roads. The purchase of a used diesel ambulance from the City of Thompson, and the conversion from ambulance to a Command Vehicle with a 250 gallon water capacity, and an enclosed Honda pump gave the PLVFD more mobility. The command vehicle also carries a ladder; portable generator; lighting; hoses; portable pumps; power ice auger; first aid kit; tools, and various other firefighting tools and equipment. Some other northern fire departments donated used turnout gear, which some of the crew members continue to use. All pumps are fitted to use the standard 1 ½ inch Manitoba Conservation discarded fire hose and fittings.

A possible Fire Hall location had been discussed with local Conservation Officers; the Minister of Manitoba Conservation and deputies by mail and telephone. Various options were studied, but none were approved. Then on a low water level year, Natural Resources had problems getting water at their intake in Cottage Bay and decided to put a pipeline from Liz Lake to their water treatment plant. They cleared an access road to Liz Lake for the pipeline.

Manitoba Conservation Officers proposed the 200 X 200 foot site where the Fire Hall is now located, with additional space if needed. The PLVFD agreed to this proposal, thinking that a source of water would be essential for a Fire Hall. The clearing of trees and site excavations soon began. Fill was hauled into the site and a culvert was installed. Resources later located a deeper spot for a water intake on Cottage Bay, and abandoned the pipeline idea, which is why the Fire Hall currently lacks a plumbing system.

The PLVFD still didn't have enough funds to build a Fire Hall, until a letter from then Manitoba Conservation Minister, Steve Ashton was sent to the PLVFD stating that the Parks District Program could assist with the administration of funds by adding an annual appropriate amount to the Parks District Service Fee for all cottages and businesses IF the majority of PLCOA members and Executive were in support of the project. The then PLCOA executive were concerned about maintenance and operating costs of the operation, and had resisted the idea of building a Fire Hall. Finally, after presentations by the PLVFD, a motion was made from the floor at a PLCOA annual meeting to proceed with the construction of a Fire Hall. The motion passed with only one dissenting recorded vote!

PLCOA executives since, are pleased with the reduced insurance premiums, and fully support the PLVFD in their improvements to the hall. Finally, with financing in place, efforts could be more focused on construction of a Fire Hall and training, rather than on fund raising. Seven continuous years of fund raising were burning the PLVFD members out. Plans were drawn up and tenders sent out to local contractors. M. B. Construction was the lowest bid received, and after the site preparation, construction began. The PLVFD kicked in an additional \$7,000.00 for the construction from their savings. Wives and Fire Fighters mudded; taped and painted the interior to save on the finishing costs. With the finishing of the new building, gear and the truck could be housed in a heated

building. The PLVFD later located a written off 3 ton low mileage fire truck, which added another 650 gallons to the total mobile capability of the PLVFD. (800 rolling gallons was the minimum required amount for Official Recognition by the insurance industry as a Semi Protected Community)

The Grand Opening of the Paint Lake Fire Hall was held in the Fire Hall on October 30, 2004. The ceremony was a very special event, marking a project 9 years in the making. The MLA's assistant; Mayor of Thompson and the Thompson RCMP; and Manitoba Conservation congratulated the PLVFD, and presented the plaques, which hang on the interior wall today. These local dignitaries spoke about the hard work the PLVFD had gone through to achieve this result. It was truly a grassroots effort by a determined and dedicated group of men and women, who look at the Fire Hall with great pride. The annual operating budget covers maintenance; operating costs; Workman's Compensation; MPI; yearly truck inspections and purchase of new equipment and safety gear for the Fire Fighters. A larger used Fire Truck was added to the fleet in the fall of 2012, but cannot be housed at present, so sits empty beside the Fire Hall, awaiting an expansion so that it can be housed without winter freeze up problems, and possibilities of damage. This is the most capable truck in the 3 truck fleet and needs to be housed inside in winter months, which means the oldest truck will be decommissioned and drained this fall, unfortunately.

The Chief of the Thompson Fire and Emergency Services Department encouraged the PLVFD to join the Hudson Bay Training District, which meant the PLVFD could train with other northern Fire Fighters at the Fire College in Thompson. It was with great pride that the PLVFD took part in the official ceremonies with other northern Fire Departments at the Tribute to Fire Fighters Ceremony in Thompson, when the Tribute was first unveiled.

Another proud moment was when after many telephone calls; filling out forms; sending letters with photos; the PLVFD was officially recognized by The Fire Commissioner's Office on Sept. 16, 2003, followed shortly afterwards by the Insurance Industry in finally achieving a \*Partially Protected Community Status. It took many years of hard work to reach this achievement, plus the continued support of the Cottagers, who are pleased with their reduced insurance premiums.

The PLVFD continues to place barrel pumps at strategic locations for remote cottages clusters, and trains remote cottagers in their use during summer months. Helitac has the advantage of faster mobility times for remote fires. The PLVFD has also received Wildfire Training from Manitoba Conservation Instructors, and has fought structural fires with Helitac concentrating efforts on the forest. The PLVFD has a close rapport with both Helitac and the City of Thompson Fire & Emergency Services Department. Helitac is only seasonal, which is why the PLVFD has fought Wildfires.

The PLVFD also hands out pamphlets on fire safety each year during Fire Safety Week. They also make educational fire pamphlets available to the general public by placing them in the Paint Lake Resort Restaurant entry way. Fire can be a terribly sad event for everyone, and the financial losses can be staggering for families, so fire prevention education is paramount. Manitoba Conservation and the PLVFD need to revise the current out- dated disaster plans, and inform cottagers and park users about

the evacuation plans, with respect to seeking shelter and what to take along for children and pets, and how to get there, in the worst event of a possible closure of highway 375, the only highway.

It takes a special person to be a volunteer fire fighter, and spend Friday evening; all day Saturday and Sunday in courses at the Fire College. Volunteers might be placed in harm's way during a fire, which produces heat; toxic gases; electrical hazards and the possibilities of explosions. The PLVFD is a talented group of individuals with a wide variety of skills, and backgrounds. They are all volunteers. The Chief and Deputies plan for training sessions, and carry out the business of the PLVFD. There are twenty five fire fighters; a Chaplain, and book keeping and accounting personnel behind the scenes. Since the PLVFD incorporation in 1995, many volunteers have served on this group of committed people, in one capacity or another.

Each September long weekend in connection with the annual Gary Watt Memorial Mainlanders vs. Islanders Soft Ball Tournament, a Pancake Breakfast is held at the Fire Hall, with silent auctions and draws for both donated and hand crafted items. Manitoba Conservation assists in this fund raiser by setting up project dining tents and picnic tables, in case of inclement weather. Sponsors generously donate the uncooked food items for the PLVFD breakfast menu, which is prepared by the members of the PLVFD. This profit combines to make future equipment like portable pump purchases and safety gear possible.

If you have attended one of these events, you would have noticed the rather cramped conditions inside the Fire Hall. Cottagers will be asked to support an expansion of the present Fire Hall with 2 trucks crowded inside. The PLVFD has very little space for meetings and training with the trucks inside the Hall, especially in winter months when freezing of pumps and valves is a huge issue. Taking notes while standing, leaning on a truck hood isn't very comfortable, but that's the only space remaining.

This expansion would greatly aid in improving faster response times as well as provide some space for meetings and training. The primary mission of the PLVFD is providing Life and Fire Protection for the 204 road accessible; 88 remote cottages; campground RV's; parking lots and largest boat marina in the Province; two businesses and the Manitoba Conservation Complex in Paint Lake Provincial Park.

Thompson Fire & Emergency Services continues to provide Mutual Aid to the PLVFD to the extent of their capabilities at the time of a request, as is dictated by their equipment and manpower availability. They also initiate the call out to the PLVFD after a fire is reported to them by telephone. The PLVFD scrambles their trucks and crew from that point on. If anyone encounters a fire in Paint Lake Provincial Park, the number to call is: 204- 677- 7911. The Thompson Fire Department will then contact the PLVFD, who will respond immediately, regardless of weather conditions.

\*Also note worthy are the efforts made to equip the PLVFD with stretchers and emergency defibrillator packs by the Valentino Family. The PLVFD is very grateful for their gift.

Plans for an extension are currently being drawn and soon applications will be made for the various permits required for the project. The Fire Hall Building Committee reports to the PLVFD and PLCOA members to keep them abreast of plans. The proposed extension will have 3 bays for the trucks, and the older building will be converted into a classroom, for interactive training purposes and meetings, and will have a washroom with an interior water tank for water supply; septic tank; pressure tank; water heater; toilet sink and mirror. It also requires flat screen capabilities to make possible modern Fire Training in a classroom atmosphere.

Some Provincial Parks; municipalities and smaller communities have received Grants from the Building Canada Fund for Enhancing and Modernizing Public Infrastructure to promote Safer Communities. The PLVFD's Primary Mission is to protect Lives and Property of the Paint Lake Cottagers. Both the Honourable Manitoba Infrastructure Minister Ashton and the Honourable Minister Mackintosh of Manitoba Conservation are aware of this project and the need for a grant to assist with the financing. The Federal Minister of Infrastructure has indicated that a New Canada Building Plan was announced in the last Federal Budget, and Intergovernmental Affairs is working on new program parameters. Details are pending at this time. Hopefully Paint Lake will qualify for a much needed infrastructure grant, if the program parameters were to include grants for fire halls.

Cottagers will be shown the plans and have any questions answered at a future special PLCOA meeting, by the Building Committee. Paint Lake Cottagers will be notified of this meeting, well in advance. It is essential for cottagers to be present to study the extension plans, and discuss this important issue, and make the final decision of how to proceed, so that financing is secured, and tenders can be sent out and work can begin early in the Spring of 2014, hopefully.

PLCOA/PLVFD Building Committee