



Vancouver Retired Fire Fighters



NEWSLETTER

2024 January

PRESIDENT

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President

Tony Neratini

Hi everyone, well here we are a month into 2024 already. I would like to thank all those members that attended our Annual Dinner in October. Great time, great venue, great to see you all again! If you couldn't make it last year please try to make it this year, I am sure you won't be disappointed.

We have a lot of new members to our Association so I am going to go over the Presumptive Cancer Legislation again. These Presumptive Laws have been put into effect by the B.C. Legislature, through WorkSafeBC and **do apply to Retired Members**. The Legislation says they must all be Primary Site Cancers.

RECORDING SECRETARY

John Hudson
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- Leukemia
- Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma
- Bladder Cancer

- Brain Cancer
- Colorectal Cancer
- Kidney Cancer
- Ureter Cancer
- Testicular Cancer
- Non-Smokers Lung Cancer
- Esophageal Cancer
- Heart Disease and Heart Injury
- Breast Cancer
- Prostate Cancer
- Multiple Myeloma
- Operational Stress Injury (PTSD)
- Cervical Cancer
- Ovarian Cancer
- Penile Cancer
- Pancreatic Cancer
- Thyroid Cancer

These are the cancers that are deemed Presumptive for Fire Fighters, but if you are diagnosed with any form of cancer, I urge you to contact myself or any other member of our Executive so that we are aware.

Alex Matches was a big contributor to our Newsletter for many, many years. I have included a tribute to Alex written by David W. Mitchell and presented at Alex's Celebration of Life (*see end of newsletter*).

Recording Secretary

John Hudson

Hello Brothers and Sisters, Happy New Year to all. I hope everyone had a Great Christmas and a Happy start to the New Year.

Thank you all that made it to the annual Retired Guys Dinner, sadly I missed it as I was down with covid. I understand that it was a great success. A big shout to Linda K for all her efforts in helping your Retired Guys Committee for a lot of what we do would not get done without her help.

There are a few things I will report on. As many of you know, since Dennis Wilson's passing a new group has formed The Retired Fire Fighters Wellness Group. This group has been formed in the hopes that we can assist those that are retired and struggling with depression,

PTSD, and any other form of mental stress. This group is in the development stages at this time and while we are not fully up and running, we will certainly assist those the make a request. While we acknowledge the BCPFFA has been principally focused on working members with workplace stress, they have been working on programs to assist retired members and now have a lot of information on their web site regarding PTSD and retired members. We have not officially contacted them, but we would like to be able to work alongside them as any help will be good for anyone dealing with late on set PTSD or other mental or stress related issues.

Regarding Dennis's case, it was rejected by Work Safe, because Dennis had no earlier claim to PTSD or depression Work Safe Found no connection to his work on the job. The Wellness Group has spent the better part of 2023 gathering and researching information for an appeal which was submitted in December. Work Safe is now reviewing said documents and must give us a decision by mid-February.

Included in this group are Rick Kearney, Mike Joy, John Hudson, and Don Symington. We ask that Don is not contacted as he is currently dealing with some family matters.

With the gracious help and financing of the 314 Holding Society we are in the process of forming a Society. So, a big thank you to them.

We will have more information available in the next few months.

Your Retired Guys Committee had an invitation from the management group of the VFRS to attend the introduction of the new electric engine. It is quite a piece of equipment. Some of the features are the ability to pump on the move, front and rear dual steering which cuts the turn radius down. In fact, in can pretty turn around in its on length. An amazing light system inside and out, a pump panel that is about the size of my laptop. Now that it is in service, we will see how efficient it is using electric power.

So now into my reminder to get your shots and tests done. For the newly retired this is important to get your pneumonia, shingles, and any other vaccinations your doctor might recommend.

Here is a new one for you, probably more important to newly retired. This is regarding hearing aids. I have just applied for hearing coverage and was turned down. As I found out this is not a new problem it seems that about 50% will get turned down. In the rejection letter I was told that as an officer we are not close enough to the scene to have the noise affect us. Apparently, this applies to Captains and B/Cs as this is a supervisory position that does mostly office work. As I was an officer for 10 years, I have lost tens of years of service. Work Safe also does a weighted average of 8 hours of work time exposure to noise. So, with the advent of the 24hr. shift this should be adjusted, however we all know Work Safe does take its time with anything. I spoke with the BCPFFA health and safety coordinator Steve Farina to express my concern. He said that he would reach out to his Work Safe contact. Just before Christmas I was contacted by a WorkSafe representative. I expressed my concerns and had a discussion regarding how and where they test. As location would make a big difference. The rep. said that they are doing their best while he was pleasant to talk to, he was just messenger.

So, at this point lesson learned apply for your hearing aids soon after you retire as the longer you wait the less likely your claim will be accepted.

This past September I had an email from Tom Millars' wife Carol saying that Tom was reading the most recent newsletter. As I recall I had encouraged everyone should they be dealing with cancer to apply for Work Safe. Tom was wondering if he should apply. I explained to him most certainly, should his application be accepted there were certain benefits his family would be covered for even if he did not get a pension. To keep this already long letter shorter, I will say that this past week I received an email from Carol saying that both his cancers were accepted. The cancers

involved are on the presumptive list and are kidney cancer and prostate cancer. Tom has had treatment for both and is doing well, a tumor was removed from his kidney, and he is responding well to treatment for his prostate cancer. Good on you Brother Millar. Tom thought it would be beneficial for others to know, so they might make the choice to apply.

That is the end of my report, a little longer than usual. Wishing you good health a long and happy retirement Have a Great New Year.

Recording Secretary, Retired Committee

John Hudson

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Vice President

Albert Drinovz

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable Christmas season and New Years with family and friends. I also hope nobody was affected with Covid during the holiday season. Winter was very mild until early January when that cold snap arrived. That was chilly.

Since the last newsletter there has been one retirement, Gord Ditchburn. I'm sure there will be more in the upcoming months with the changes from two years ago to the pension plan.

There has been a number of our members who have passed away this past year. The latest are: Bob Bulloch, Malcolm Johnson, Bob Templeton, AC Wilf Ferguson, & Daryle Van Horn. Some families will not have a memorial/funeral service while others have had or will have a service later. If not all, most of your executive board attends as many services as possible. We (Tony) will notify our members as soon as we are informed of any services.

Our association had an in person meeting at #15 firehall on Sept. 14. The next meeting is Mar. 7, 2024 in the community room at #15 firehall.

We were finally able to have our annual dinner. We honored 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023's retirees. The dinner was held on Oct. 16 at the Sheraton Guildford and was well attended. We had a number of prizes to be won: \$1100 Grant Muir, \$550 Ray Lamb, \$550 John Donaldson and a \$250 Costco gift card Don Pears.

On Nov. 1 Howie, John and myself (Tony was in the hospital) represented our association at Local 18's annual retirement dinner at the Italian Cultural Centre.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **March 7:** Retired Association Meeting - #15 Fire Hall

FACEBOOK

If you are on Facebook please join the retirees group (Vancouver Fire Retirees) that Bob Hollier has created and administers. There is a lot of information on this page that will keep you up to date.

Please update your personal information (new address, email, phone number(s), etc.) with Tony or myself. If you haven't already supplied Tony or myself with your email address please do so. Tony sends out a lot of information by email on such things as meetings, deaths, celebrations of life, pensions, this newsletter, etc.

If there is a change to your beneficiary notify all parties (ie: pension board, banks, insurance companies, us, etc.).

Treasurer

Howie Brown

Another year. The jolly elf has returned to his summer quarters, and we have a new piece of cardboard on the wall to let us know what month it is.

After a four-year hiatus, it was great to see so many of you at the banquet in October. I hope you had as great a time as I had. The kitchen table lives on in the hearts of most of us, and it is always great to return, even if only for a couple of hours.

Thanks must go to those in our firefighter family, the Holding Society, Local 18, and Credit Union for their continued support without which there would be no such evening. Thanks to Linda for all she does, but specifically the preparation of a power-point reflection of those that left us since we last met. Shown on two screens in the banquet hall, it was very moving.

We were able to return all the proceeds of this year's 50/50 draw to members that purchased tickets. Grant Muir was the lucky winner of \$1100.00, with Ray Lamb and John Donaldson receiving \$550.00 each. A door prize (\$250.00 Costco Gift card) was won by Don Pears.

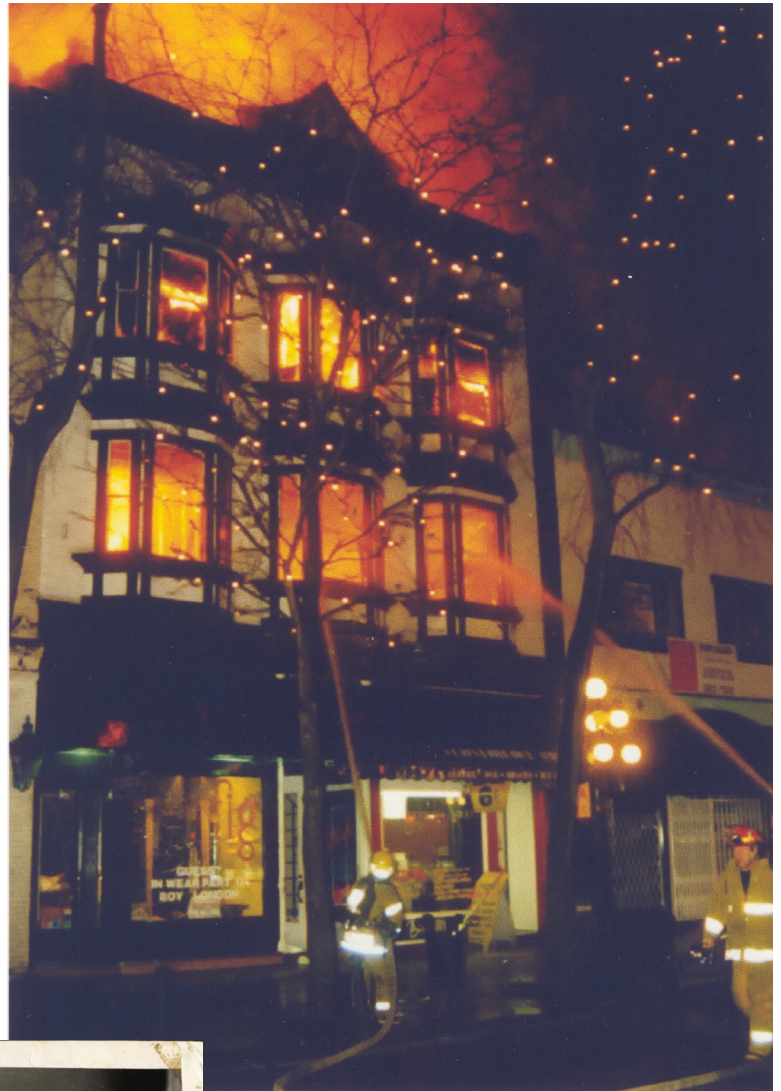
Mark your calendars, next year's banquet will be on October 21, 2024. See you there.

Invited by Chief Fry, Tony, John, and I were invited to the unveiling of the new electric engine, December 4 at Chess St. (Fred and Debbie Crouch and Norm Moodie were also there) All electric power with a diesel back up generator for extended operation, it is the way of the future. A turning radius less than that of an F350 and the ability to pump from the roof top monitor while driving is but two of the impressive innovations that will change the way they fight garbage container and vehicle fires etc. while more easily navigating some of the narrow downtown streets.

Howie Brown
Treasurer



32 Water Street - 1998

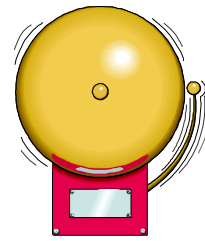


#22 Crew – date unknown

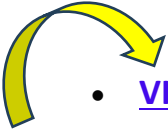


Belfour – 1944

Last Alarm



Battalion Chief Robert Bulloch	Oct. 5, 2023	83	heart
Captain Malcolm Johnson	Oct. 11, 2023	99	natural
District Chief Robert Templeton	Jan. 1, 2024	93	natural
Assistant Chief Wilf Ferguson	Jan. 4, 2024	76	natural
Captain Daryle Van Horn	Jan. 22, 2023	63	MSA



- [VIEW OUR MEMORIAL SLIDE SHOW Presented at our October, 2023 Retirement Dinner](#)



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MEMORIAL TRIBUTE TO ALEX MATCHES

(Dave W. Mitchell)

Good afternoon and I feel very honored to be here with you to talk about my friend and colleague Alex Matches. I am doubly honored that Arlene asked me to do so having known the two of them for more than 30 years in her case, at least 50 in Alex's case.

Alex started with the Vancouver Fire Department as it was known then, in January 1962 and served with pride and distinction until his retirement in 1995. Alex worked in every fire hall in the city and in his time with the fire department he recorded every call he responded to, a total of 5,757 fires, medical calls, hazmat spills and rescues. He served with distinction in so many ways including his documentation of the history which started in 1975 with "It Began with a Ronald", but I shouldn't get ahead of myself.

For us in the fire service, we have known Alex since 1962, when Hugh Bird was just finishing his term as Fire Chief, to be succeeded by Ralph Jacks in March of that year. Alex as you know had a prior career starting with the RCMP in 1954, a story that has been well told by retired Superintendent Ric Hall and which included Alex's service with the Musical Ride. Superintendent Hall had a lot that was very complimentary about Alex and by chance I got to know Ric Hall when he was officer commanding with Coquitlam RCMP.

When Alex began his career as a firefighter, trading in his saddle and revolver for a pillow and blankets, it was at a time when, in rainy Vancouver, the fire department only bought open cab apparatus. It wasn't until 1964 that the Department began to purchase closed cab apparatus but the roof only covered the driver and the officer. The firefighters still rode outside in the rain, sleet and snow, standing on the tailboard at the back of the apparatus and hanging on for dear life. Closed cab apparatus began to be introduced in 1967 but the last open cab apparatus wasn't retired until the 1980's, some were retained beyond 40 years.

Although today we know the dangers of firefighting in terms of heart disease, PTSD and the 18 types of cancer directly related to your profession as a firefighter, back in those days Alex and his colleagues responded to fires wearing a canvas coat, regular trousers, leather boots and a bakelite helmet without a face shield. It was then, and still is, a very dangerous profession.

Gloves were not normally provided and there were very few air masks, never enough for everyone and many of those only had 15 minute tanks. It wasn't until Expo 86, and the Skytrain tunnel, that a limited number of 60 minute, longer-duration air bottles were provided. The complete turnout apparel you see today was only achieved in the later 1990's.

In those early days, firefighters most definitely were "smoke eaters" and many photos in Alex's several histories of the department show members at fire scenes, working hard in the smoke with little to no protection.

I talked with a lot of Alex's retired colleagues to share their stories with you. Everyone remembered that Alex was always serious about fire fighting, cared a great deal about training and preparedness and always brought his A-Game to work. He did this without exception. They also noted that he was always a mentor to newer members. One shared memory about Alex was provided by Randy Heberton who was working at #9 hall where Alex was the Lieutenant. Also working there was Wayne Dairon another ex-Mountie.

Randy recalls how the crew got together and began parading around the apparatus floor posing as members of the RCMP musical ride, with pike poles for lances. He says they all had their right arm up in the air with her fingers pointing to the sky and that was their flag. As they paraded around the apparatus floor, bouncing up and down they simulated riding on horses like in the musical ride, making clipping and clopping noises like horses' hooves. He recalls that Alex and Wayne found this immensely funny.

I also spoke with Bob Pachota who echoed the comment that you could always, always count on Alex to be prepared and on his game; there was never a time he ever saw him not prepared for any fire or other emergency. Alex was sworn in as a member of our union, Local 18 in February of 1962. His membership card showed him as member 92233, the Secretary of the Union then was John Bunyan. My memories of Alex start from seeing him at meetings of Local 18 where if he spoke, it always made sense and he was always very congenial and engaged. In 1970 the Union formed a public relations committee and Alex stepped up to join, becoming the Secretary-Treasurer, a position he held for many years. Alex was always a strong union member attending many functions including as a delegate to the provincial convention in 1974 in Penticton. I have a photograph of the members with him, including Gordie Anderson, Jack Berg, Alex Turkington, Al McLennan and many more. Alex also attended the International Association of Fire Fighters convention in Baltimore that year, representing Vancouver's membership. Also in 1974 Alex's first book "**It Began with a Ronald**" was published, described as a '**pictorial history of Vancouver's firefighting equipment**'.

The dust cover of the book noted that "**never before has a large Canadian fire department been documented in this way**". The foreword of the book describes Alex as "**the fire department's unofficial archivist**". Not sure what it would take to say he was the official archivist, and so, lacking any votes to the contrary we will refer to him as the official archivist from this day forward.

I have to share an amusing story about a sequel to that book that was never written. This goes back to 1987 when there had been a series of cutbacks to the Department, eliminating one firefighter from 13 Engines, and getting rid of the fireboat. This was an unhappy moment all around, and occurred during the time of Chief Donald Pamplin. Our duty chief at the time was Assistant Chief Tex Bell, and many of you will remember him for his very wry sense of humor.

Tex came into the dispatch office where I was working and said he just came from Chief Pamplin's office where he told the Chief that Alex Matches was planning a second book. **Oh**, said the Chief, **I hadn't heard that**. "**Yes**", said Tex *the first one was called "It Began with a Ronald"*, dramatic pause and the second one is going to be titled "**It Ended with a Donald**"at which Tex drawled...*I don't think I'm going to be getting a Christmas card from the Chief this year*.

Alex's work with the PR committee led to many ways in which he helped the department and the union to grow. For the department he had any number of roles including designing the new flag for the Department Band in 1971, and the new shoulder flashes subsequently.

Alex's awareness of public relations also helped Local 18 in 1988 when we were bidding to host the 1992 IAFF convention for Vancouver. Our pitch for this had to be made at the convention in Miami and I can confirm that Alex was a huge part of our preparation for that and that we succeeded, winning over a number of cities in the early voting. Later in 1992 we hosted the North American IAFF fire service here, and again Alex was among the many who provided support and guidance.

Another recollection, this one from Glen Maddess who was the fire chief from 1992 to 1998. Chief Maddess noted that occasionally he used to do what were termed Battalion Chief ride-a-longs when he would accompany the Battalion Chief as they conducted their firehall visits. Glen recalls he went to #18 Hall to spend the next portion of the day with Alex as he toured his district and before they left Alex called the crew together in a lineup and told them "**I just want to introduce you to our Fire Chief Glen Maddess who you wouldn't normally see. What I can about Chief Maddess is that he remembers that while he may be the Fire Chief, he is clear that I have seniority**." Glen said it was good for a laugh and that Alex did this at every hall in the district, 22, 21, 12, 19 and 4.

In addition to being very knowledgeable about good, positive public relations Alex also had a love of the antique apparatus and spent many years restoring and maintaining various pieces of equipment. This included the restoration of the 1912 Hose Wagon, an immense amount of work that he never charged for and also inspiring a new

generation of firefighters to restore and maintain the equipment, people like Charles Mulder, Ryan Cameron, Rob Jones-Cook and so many more....this all started with Alex.

In 1986 and 1987 Alex was involved once again in support of the Department among other things he did was create the Department's centennial logo. Alex and Arlene also actively participated with every celebratory event including the last Fire Fighters Ball in 1994.

Another memory is from John Hudson, also now retired. John recalls the first time he met Alex was during his probation in 1976. Alex had recently finished *It Began with a Ronald*.

John's comment was that: ***As with a lot of FF's there was a little entrepreneur in Alex, as well as being the Department Historian. He would drop by the halls to talk about his book, I found it interesting and placed an order.*** Alex was also selling gold medallions of Saint Florian the Patron Saint of Fire Fighters. John says he purchased one and still wears it around his neck after all these 47 years. While he says he has had a few knocks and bruises during his career, John says he is ***still on the sunny side of the grass. Maybe Saint Florian (and Alex) was looking out for me.***

Alex's love for history extended to everything and everyone. His books started in 1974 until his final book on the fire boat and police boat, the Saint Roch.

Alex always shared credit and he did so in the preface to his 2016 book where he noted: ***I am indebted to my family: my wife Arleen whose computer talents were needed and invaluable, along with my daughter Stephanie, who, as a newspaper publisher had contacts with printers, and my two sons, Sandy and Ryan, whose graphic skills from their sign making days were of great help.***

Alex helped so many people by providing a great example of how to live your life, not just in your primary role as a fire fighter, but also in every other way you lived. He worked hard, was always focused and I never heard him complain. He lived his life well as a firefighter, and a search of the Vancouver Sun shows him the focus of the media from an early age.

- March 1942, seven year old Alex Matches is a member of the Sun-Ray Club. As a Sun-Ray member Alex won two tickets to the Orpheum to see "Mr. Bug Goes to Town", really, you can't make this stuff up 😊
- 1947, the Sun announcing that Alex Matches now 12, was leading the school boy patrol at the crossing at McKenzie School
- 1972, Alex driving the renowned Arthur Fiedler to the symphony on the restored rig, interesting the symphony was Water Music
- 1974, Alex in the paper again, with a photograph in uniform collecting funds for UNICEF at Halloween
- 1975, Sun columnist Mike McRanor discussing Alex's first book
- 1986, Sun columnist Denny Boyd discussing with Alex the great fire of 1960 in False Creek, and many others, and Boyd identifies Alex as ***the official historian...so it must be true.***

For myself, as mentioned, I first recall talking with Alex very early in my career probably first at union meetings, and then because I was working in Dispatch I had an opportunity to talk with him whenever we were on the same shift, for the various incidents that were attended.

As Vice-President, then President of Local 18 between 1984 and 1996 we had a lot of complex issues where I needed sage advice and often spoke with Alex and benefitted from his wisdom.....and his seniority 😊. We also talked about family issues and in a troubling time for me in 1993 his advice was priceless. Alex was always the soul of discretion and provided advice about challenges but also opportunities.

This included a bit later on when we were both retired and I began work on the history of all IAFF locals in BC, for which Alex provided a huge amount of the history, things that weren't in his books but were part of this bigger picture. This book would never have happened without Alex.

Alex is also the inspiration for the Vancouver Fire Fighters Historical Society, chaired by Rolyn Potter supported by Ryan Cameron and a board of 13 which continues his good work identifying and protecting priceless artifacts for display in Vancouver fire halls.

Alex served the Department and the public with pride and more than anyone else I can think of he represented all of us with pride in the countless things he did on his own time, with the Symphony, the Museum, with UNICEF, the Burn Fund, with Muscular Dystrophy and telling stories.

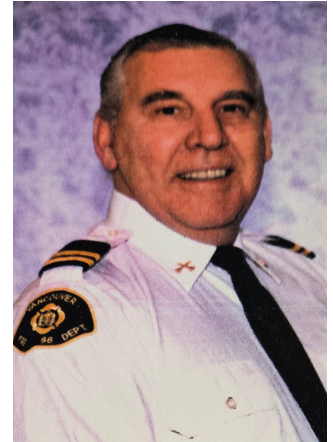
Through all this time, Arlene, you were his rock and his anchor, as was your family. He in turn was that for many of us.

Finally, I would like to share Alex's three guidelines he had for me and for all of us:

1. Always bring your A-game, second best just isn't good enough
2. This is an emergency service, never quit trying, never give up, and
3. Leave this place better than you found it.

He certainly did all of those things including leaving the place better than he found it.

Thank you. Dave W. Mitchell



No 7 first crew – December 5, 1974

Capt. Art Smith, Bob Pachota, Chris Stewart, *Alex Matches*, Art Atkins

