

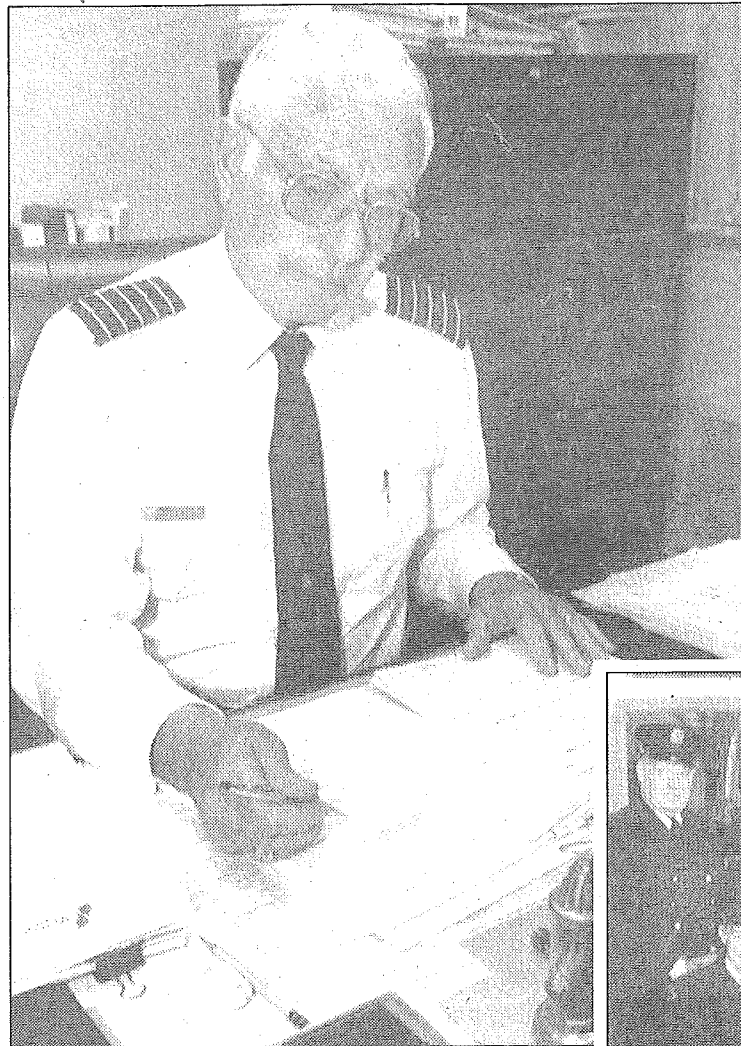
Hail and farewell

Fire Chief Gord Bentley looks forward to retirement

Peel Bldg
Scrapbook

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MN



NOW AND THEN — Mississauga Fire Chief Gord Bentley works at his desk in a contemporary photo above, and at right a younger Bentley poses with members of the Town of Streetsville Fire Department for the 1956 opening of the town's fire hall. Bentley

Some people might call it the end of an era when Mississauga Fire Chief Gord Bentley retires next month. But Bentley might suggest otherwise.

You see, Bentley says he has always been ahead of his time — a philosophy that he has extended to his department.

Without a doubt, Bentley was among the first group of modern day firefighters witnessing paradoxical changes to a profession that has expanded exponentially in scope and magnitude over the past 40 years.

And it was 40 years ago that Gord Bentley, following in his father Elmer's footsteps, began his work in fire services with the Streetsville brigade. Between 18 and 20 "close knit" people formed that fire department which answered perhaps 50 calls a year, serving a population of about 1,500 with a single pumper truck.

"Back then all we did was fight fires. It certainly isn't the same today," observes Bentley who rolled hose, ate smoke and was covered in ice with the best of them.

A firefighter for eight years, Bentley was promoted to deputy fire chief in 1959, a post he held until the 1974 amalgamation of the three area municipalities under the Mississauga city banner.

In his first two decades of service, Bentley was more than just a witness to the changes going on around him and his fellow firefighters.

As firefighting equipment was standardized, training became mandatory, educational programs were developed and cities passed fire protection bylaws, Bentley says he was always looking ahead.

Better quality personal safety gear, improved designs for trucks, hoses and ladders were Bentley's legacy to his men as was a heads-up approach to the changing firefighters' role.

"One day you'll be downtown Toronto and you'll see a fire truck and you'll say to yourself that it looks just like the trucks in Mississauga and they

will be," Bentley predicts.

But the chief refuses to take all the credit. He maintains it has always been a team effort that has led to decisions — decisions to purchase the innovative rescue equipment and send men for emergency medical training and developing how to manual on cleaning up a hazardous spill.

"No one goes running into a burning building by himself, says Bentley, insisting there's no such thing as a hero in his department.

"There's no place for heros. It's close-knit team work. Every man needs the support of his crew."

In 1978 Bentley made deputy chief and just over a year later he was appointed to the top post. It was an initiating year that would be hard to forget.

Dramatic photos of the great Mississauga train derailment hang on Bentley's wall as a reminder of Mississauga's biggest disaster.

And another half dozen major fires within the span a few weeks followed.

"I thought I was jinxed," Bentley says. But the trials had a positive effect.

"The men could stand tall, they had reason to be proud. They had self confidence. They knew they could handle the worst," he says.

Now, after 12 years at the helm, Bentley is retiring. He says more changes are in store for the department which will be run under the City's community services wing. And he believes there should be someone new to see the department through the transition. He's hopeful that his replacement will consider the human factors as well as the bottom fiscal line.

As for Bentley, he's keeping his options open. There's a piece of property in Florida he intends to haunt for a while this winter. And a cottage on Georgian Bay will be home for a couple of months this summer.

And then there are a few job offers about which he says "we'll see."

