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Caledon opens new fire station

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The opening of Caledon's new fire station on Friday 11 November could not have come at a more auspicious time, with the onset of summer and the start of the fire season, particularly in the Overberg district.

The old fire station was not at all adequate. Vehicles could not be safely parked and it could not accommodate a 24-hour shift system. This has all changed now, with the brand-new R5 million building which, on the ground floor, can accommodate the fire trucks, sleeping quarters for up to 10 firefighters, a kitchen and bathrooms.

The first floor has office space and training facilities as well as space from which a joint operations centre can be set up should a major incident or disaster occur in the area.

Reinard Geldenhuys, Chief Fire Officer of the Overberg District Municipality, welcomed guests and opened the proceedings. Chaplain Mark Robson did a scripture reading.

Overberg Mayor Sakkie Franken, in his speech, outlined "The Road to Caledon Station". There was a need for a new fire station in the town, but funding remained a problem.

The municipality entered into a public-private partnership with developer Helmut Pool, who built the



At the cutting of the ribbon are the Chief Fire Officer Reinard Geldenhuys, Helmut Pool (cutting the ribbon), ODM Mayor Sakkie Franken, TWK Mayor Kallie Papier and Local Government MEC Anton Bredell.

station the Overberg District Municipality (ODM) now leases.

This state of affairs did not happen overnight. "After much negotiation the plans were completed and the agreement went through council," Franken said.

"The station was purposefully built as a fire station with the requirements needed for the full-time, 24/7 manning of it. The 24-hour shift, which will be implemented on 1 December, will not only dramatically shorten the fire response times, but also create an additional 16 jobs through the EPWP [Expanded Public Works Programme]."



Cedric Brink saluting after the Memorial Ringing of the Bell Ceremony. Photos: Mitzi Buys

Caledon's Division Commander, Chris Pieterse, led a poignant Memorial Ringing of the Bell Ceremony, honouring firemen who lost their lives in the line of duty, with Cedric Brink ringing the bell.

Western Cape Local Government MEC Anton Bredell, who delivered the keynote address, told those attending, including Theewaterskloof Mayor Kallie Papier and Deputy Mayor John Michels, infrastructure such as the new fire station will benefit Caledon residents on several levels, including their safety, as the station will allow for a faster and more comprehensive response to fire

emergencies.

He said: "The location, with quick access to the N2, as well as the fact that they will be operational 24 hours a day, will add to your increased responsiveness."

"The new station will enhance Caledon's appeal to potential investors in your local economy."

"With climate change and rapid population growth, fires and the potential of death and injury to our people will increase. It is therefore important that all stakeholders work together as a team and support one another as we face these challenges."

A drill performance by the squad was followed by the cutting of the ribbon by developer Pool and the official unveiling of the plaque.

Tillie Smith, widow of Joos Smith, a local firefighter who tragically lost his life on duty, on 12 June 2019, was one of the honorary guests invited to attend the opening.

She told *Hermanus Times*: "I always worried when my husband was on duty, and never slept at night until he was home safely. That night I miraculously fell asleep and woke up to knocking at the door. Thinking it was him returning I got up, but when I saw my eldest son in the passage I turned around again."

"When I heard my son cry when I opened the door, after seeing who was there, I knew something bad had happened. Fire Chief Reinard Geldenhuys, Overberg Deputy Mayor Lincoln de Bruyn and Mr Newman, a deacon at our church, were there to tell me my husband had died fighting a fire."

"On the morning of the opening of the new fire station I was a bit sad. It was my birthday and usually my husband would have showered me with gifts. When I got there and saw everybody and the lovely poster of him they had put up in the foyer it took the sadness away a bit."

"I feel so honoured and appreciate their inviting me and my youngest son, Mateo, to the opening. My husband would have been so proud of this new building."

Firefighters are always in need of certain items when out extinguishing fires. These include eye drops, lip ice or Vaseline (small container), energy bars, chocolate, energy drinks (Powerade, Energade), bottled water and sweets such as Super C.

Pick n Pay at Victoria Mall has a trolley in the shop where these items can be dropped off. Canned and dry food donations such as baked beans, sweet corn, bully beef, pasta, rusks, tea, coffee and sugar can also be put in it.

To make the station a bit more homely, A4 photo frames are needed for the photo displays. Bed linen will also be welcome.

To report a fire in the Overberg area contact the ODM Fire Station Control Room on 028 425 1690.

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