

May 15, 2013

## The Bethany College Connection

*Text and Photos by Randy Klassen, Instructor at Bethany College*



### Burning Down the House

It was only the second warm Saturday of spring, but May 4<sup>th</sup> was smoking hot in Hepburn. In fact, for a good part of the morning, clouds of black smoke billowed up and over the town, as Hepburn's volunteer fire department battled a blaze on the campus of Bethany College. This was no accidental emergency, however, but a training exercise resulting from a creative collaboration between Bethany College and the Hepburn Fire Department and First Responders.

The controlled burn took down the house at the main (east) entrance of the Bethany Campus. This building has had a long and worthy term of service at Bethany, dating back at least to the early 1960s, and has housed both staff and students over the decades. However, it was more recently in need of serious renovations. It had been vacant for a year or more, and various options for the building's future were explored, including renovation and removal. Eventually the option emerged of offering it to the Hepburn fire department for their professional development. The building was then gutted, and any usable items were salvaged, in preparation for the controlled burn.



Hepburn fire chief Gordon Jackson and his team of about a dozen volunteers showed up on the Saturday, May 4, for the training exercise. With both a new fire truck and the town's recently installed fire hydrants, there was lots for the firefighters to practice and try out. At 9:30 a.m., the fire was set in the basement. Several minutes later, the first grey wisps of smoke were visible. As thick smoke filled the house, several of the men went in and their hands and knees for a search-and-rescue drill. The unique set-up of the house made it particularly worthwhile, as an added-on

room had a separate entrance, which would have been an unusual situation to find in a burning building. The firefighters emerged from the smoky doorway, and soon, some forty minutes after the fire was set, the first flames were seen through the kitchen window. From that point on, the conflagration grew rapidly. The house was closely surrounded on three sides by a windbreak, and Hepburn's firefighters showed their skill as they controlled the fire and protected the trees as much as possible from the intense heat. By 11:30, two hours after the fire was set, the house was virtually razed to the ground. Flames and smoke still licked at the fallen smouldering walls, but only the tall brick chimney



Ron Sigstad, Hepburn School Principal and volunteer firefighter, waves from Hepburn's new fire truck

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remained to show the former height of the structure.

No one ever wants to deal with the terror and tragedy of an accidental house fire. It's reassuring to see a committed corps of volunteers working hard to train and maintain the preparedness that every community needs to defend itself against such crises. Thanks go to the Hepburn Fire Department and First Responders for their commitment to the community. Bethany College was glad to work with them to create this opportunity for emergency preparedness and community service.



Firefighter Ben Goertzen and son Tanner

For more information about Bethany College, please go to our website: [www.bethany.sk.ca](http://www.bethany.sk.ca).

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