

Making the city safer through public education

By MAGGIE RIOPELLE
Senior Staff Reporter

The fire department of Welland is on a mission — they hope to save lives and teach people how to be prepared.

Presently, the fire department is travelling around to homes to do inspections of smoke alarms, to ensure they are working, hooked up, and the batteries are charged.

While it may seem like a nuisance to some, the fact of the matter is that smoke alarms save lives.

With limited resources, however, the fire prevention department has not been able to visit all the homes, apartment buildings, and seniors' residences in the community.

But little by little, they are making headway.

"This is our third year (doing inspections) but we haven't done the whole city," explained Tom Nenadovich, fire prevention officer for the City of Welland Fire and Emergency Services. "We are making a big difference. Just last week, we had two lives that were saved because of a smoke alarm."

The fire department, he continued, are usually seen as the good guys, but there is a fire and smoke alarms were not in working order, residents may be fined.

"The time is coming where we will have to get serious," he added. "We did successful lay charges in one case and it went through the courts. People died because someone wasn't responsible to check their smoke detectors. We hoped people would get the message. We want landlords to call in and make sure their alarms are working and their properties are safe."

The Welland Safe Community Partnership is hoping to help with safety initiatives, such as fire prevention and education efforts, to make the city a safer place to live, work and play.

"The fire department is doing an excellent job with its programs," said Coun. Pat Chiochio, chair of the Safe Community Partnership steering committee. "From a Safe Community perspective, we want to work closely with community partners. Learning about initiatives, such as the fire prevention and their needs for additional support, I can now go back to the committee to help create a safer city."

Another area where the fire department promotes safety is with children. During the school year, the department has a number of fire prevention sessions, where children are given the assignment of creating an emergency escape plan.

The children bring the

paper home, have their parents help them draw a floor plan, then draw an escape plan in case of an emergency.

"We also hope the parents take the time to have a fire drill with their children. We also teach the children tips, like how to check a door. You use the back of your hand, because it is the most sensitive, and put it against the door. Never grab the handle of the door, it may be too hot and you can burn your hand. That and, it is difficult to crawl if you have burnt your hand," explained Mr. Nenadovich.

Of course, with limited resources, the fire department only teaches fire prevention and safety to children up to Grade 8. They hope to be able to reach high school students, as many of them leave the community for college. The Safe Community initiative may be able to help the fire department in this respect as well.

"We want to get the information into the high schools. Many of them are going off to college, leaving the community, and living in private homes or residences. We want to know our children are protected when they leave our community. This year, we will be attending the orientation evening for Niagara College, so we will be reaching youth coming into our community," said Mr. Nenadovich.

"Working together we may be able to deal with some of these issues," said Coun. Chiochio. "Education is so important."

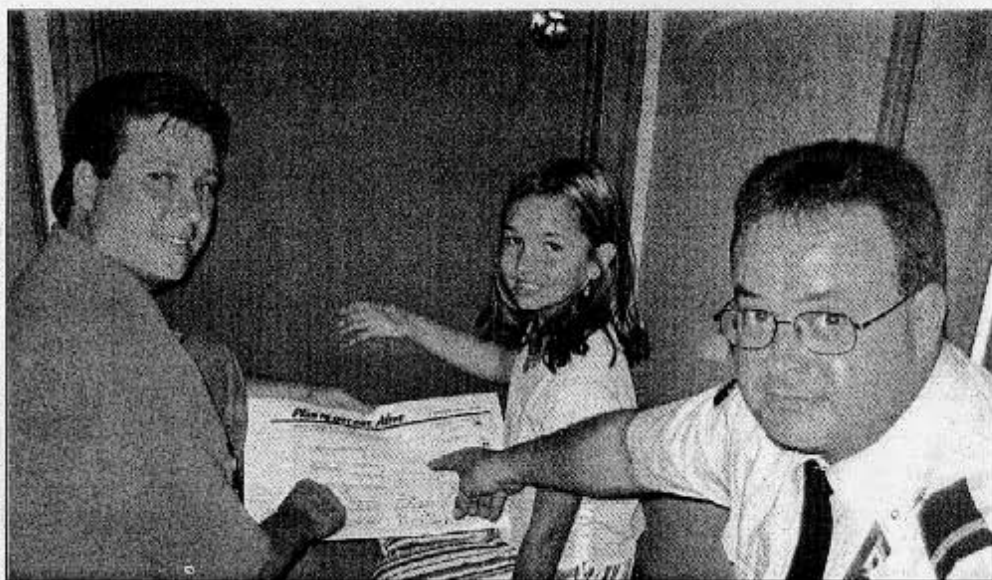
Two of the major causes of fire is unattended pots on the stove and candles, added Mr. Nenadovich.

"We see a lot of fires from candles. Some people leave tea light candles burning continually, and the bottom can get very hot. I have seen them ignite. Either that, or people have pets and the pets knock over the candles. It's also important not to have the candles near the curtains."

In order to enhance public awareness, the fire department has a website at www.welland.ca, which has information on opening burning, fire safety tips, and an interactive children's section.

"We are also more than happy to answer calls if anyone has any questions," said Mr. Nenadovich. "It's better to be safe than sorry. We also tell people, that if you do have a pot on fire, always had the lid nearby so you can put the fire out. Even if you get the fire out, you should call us because we can make sure the area is safe."

For more information, contact the Welland Fire and Emergency Services.



Coun. Pat Chiochio, chair of the Welland Safe Community Partnership steering committee, and his daughter Kelsy, get a lesson in fire safety, emergency planning, and the important of working smoke detectors from Tom Nenadovich, fire prevention officer with the City of Welland Fire and Emergency Services.

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