

FIREFIGHTING



WAYNE CAMPBELL/FOR POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn passes a key to Bearskin Lake First Nation Deputy Chief Wayne Brown and Northwestern Ontario regional fire safety officer Lawrence Laviolette, with Rotary International director Doug Johnson. Behind is Ward 3 Coun. Peter Papp, Welland Rotary president. Pelham donated the decommissioned 1991 pumper to the remote Northern Ontario First Nation.

Bearskin Lake picks up Pelham pumper truck

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Special to Postmedia Network

Wayne Brown thought he would just meet a guy to get a key.

The deputy chief of Bearskin Lake First Nation told Pelham town council Monday he was "overwhelmed by the hospitality."

Brown and Lawrence Laviolette, regional fire safety co-ordinator from Sioux Lookout, came to pick up a key to a 1991 pumper truck from the Pelham fire department.

Mayor Dave Augustyn passed the key to Ward 3 Coun. Peter Papp who is also president of Rotary Club of Welland, and he passed it to Brown.

The Rotary club will arrange for transporting the truck to Bearskin Lake.

The decommissioned truck will serve the remote northwestern Ontario reserve, accessible only by air and winter ice roads.

The community of 900 people has four areas — airport, down-

town, residential and medical — each separated by a few kilometres. It has 12 fire hydrants.

Its fire equipment has been reduced to a pickup truck carrying a water tank since the breakdown of a 1982 pumper.

"You can't get parts for it," said Laviolette in an interview beside the Pelham pumper. "This truck will make a huge difference."

Bearskin Lake has a fire department of "real volunteers, no pay" he said. The firefighting equipment is limited to the pickup truck with assistance from water tankers that serve homes and offices.

Brown told council the fire department was formed 20 years ago following a fire in which a toddler died.

"We had no fire truck and people tried to break into the metal house with chainsaws," he said.

The Pelham pumper was decommissioned because it no longer qualifies for insurance under provincial regulations. However, the reserve operates

under federal regulations.

"They could get another 20 years out of that truck," said Pelham fire Chief Bob Lymburner.

The pumper will first go to Sioux Lookout and wait for February. Then it will be cold enough to form ice roads thick enough, about three-quarters of a metre, to carry heavy trucks.

"That's when we get our supplies in," said Brown. "They have to cross a number of lakes."

Papp said Rankin Construction of St. Catharines has offered to arrange transportation of the Pelham fire truck.

Originally the Rotary club planned to send fire equipment to Central and South America, said Rotary International director Doug Johnson.

After reading about fires in Northern Ontario, he started asking around and found out about Bearskin Lake.

Deputy Chief Brown said he was not only grateful but brought a gift of moccasins for the mayor and fire chief.