

Honourable Paulie Chinna
Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs

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Firefighter Recognition

Mr. Speaker, the safety of our residents is a priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories. Through the Office of the Fire Marshal and the Emergency Management Organization, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, or MACA, supports communities in building local capacity in response to emergencies.

During 2020's holiday season, our communities and residents suffered two serious fires in the Northwest Territories, or NWT. As Minister for MACA, I would like to express my gratitude to all the emergency responders.

Unfortunately, these recent incidents highlight the fact that fire losses, particularly during the holiday season, do happen. Our work to prevent loss of life and property must continue to be a priority.

Fires can place a heavy burden on families, communities, and governments. Providing fire services in the North is challenging for all community governments given our remote locations, limited access to resources and harsh environment.

Mr. Speaker, in order to deliver fire services, the NWT relies heavily on volunteer firefighters. The delivery of fire prevention and fire protection services in our communities would not be possible without the many career and volunteer firefighters across the NWT and their significant contributions. This is a tough job, thankfully we have many individuals who take on this duty.

There is a tremendous commitment required to be a volunteer firefighter. These individuals:

- sacrifice time away from family and friends;
- must attend training to keep their skills fresh in order to safely respond to calls;
- have a role in educating residents in how they can protect themselves from fire;
- they respond to and investigate the cause of fires; and
- they have a role in inspecting our buildings to ensure people can get out safely.

Mr. Speaker, given this very important role that firefighters have, it is essential that we recognize and acknowledge the efforts of those who provide these services which contribute to our safety and security.

- The first is a Long Service Recognition Program which awards recipients for NWT service with medals and pins for years of service; and
- The second is the NWT Fire Service Merit Award. This award is presented to individual firefighters and/or community fire departments that have made significant contributions to the NWT fire service and community fire protection.

Mr. Speaker, today I want to highlight the service of one of the Territories most outstanding volunteers and to celebrate the recipient of the 2020 NWT Fire Service Merit Award, Mr. David Bernhardt.

The community of Inuvik nominated Mr. Bernhardt for his contributions to the NWT Fire Service and an incredible 40 years of dedicated service to the residents of Inuvik. Originally from Cape Dyer, Nunavut, Mr. Bernhardt moved to Inuvik with his family early in the 1960s. He joined the Inuvik Fire Department in 1980 and has served as a firefighter, Lieutenant, Captain, and Deputy Fire Chief. In 2019, his colleagues bestowed him with the Canadian Municipal Long Service Award, which recognizes achievements of long-serving volunteer firefighters in communities across Canada.

Today, Mr. Bernhardt remains an active member of the fire department, sharing his history and knowledge as a mentor to junior firefighters. Although he no longer is on the front line of fighting fires, he currently ensures exterior firefighting operations run efficiently and more importantly, maintains a calm, steady presence with a watchful eye that provides for the safety of everyone at fire scenes.

Mr. Bernhardt does not know when he will retire from volunteer firefighting, but he considers his fellow firefighters as family and loves to contribute in any way he can. Firefighter Bernhardt is a unique and admirable individual and so I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on receiving the 2020 NWT Fire Service Merit Award.

I also want to thank all firefighters across the NWT for their dedication and commitment in making our Territory safer!

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.