

Part Three
Anmore Alternative News March 5 2015 Retirement Interview
with Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department
Chief Larry Scott

Retirement is a time for reflection and for new beginnings. As you retire from so many fruitful years as the Chief of the Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department the Anmore Alternative News pays tribute to you and would like to ask the following questions.

- How did the SVFD come about? How did it look back then?



I'll give you my recollections, but really Belcarra Mayor Ralph Drew is a historian who would have the best knowledge of this. What I remember is the SVFD came about way back when Belcarra was getting a lot of pressure to be absorbed into the GVRD Park system. Belcarra ratepayers wanted to create their own municipality so that the GVRD could not take these lands. William Vander Salm was the Premier of the day and embraced a 'small is beautiful' philosophy. He thought that this could work but the community had to be self-sufficient.

One of the initiatives to become self-sufficient was to create the fire department. The fire department encompassed the Village of Belcarra, parts of Electoral Area B which included IOCO up to April road, the IOCO lands, and the Village of Anmore. It qualified as a GVRD fire department since it protected more than one jurisdiction. Several communities shared the same function. Shortly afterwards,

Anmore became a municipality and now the fire department was Anmore, Belcarra, and parts of electoral area B.

Subsequently, Port Moody had a boundary extension to include the IOCO lands. Since Imperial Oil Company wasn't sure of its future plans for the refinery, it didn't want to be the sole industrial tax base for the fire department. Port Moody took over the IOCO lands, and the fire department now served the Villages of Anmore and Belcarra.

AAN: Sasamat is an Indian name. Was it named because of the lake?



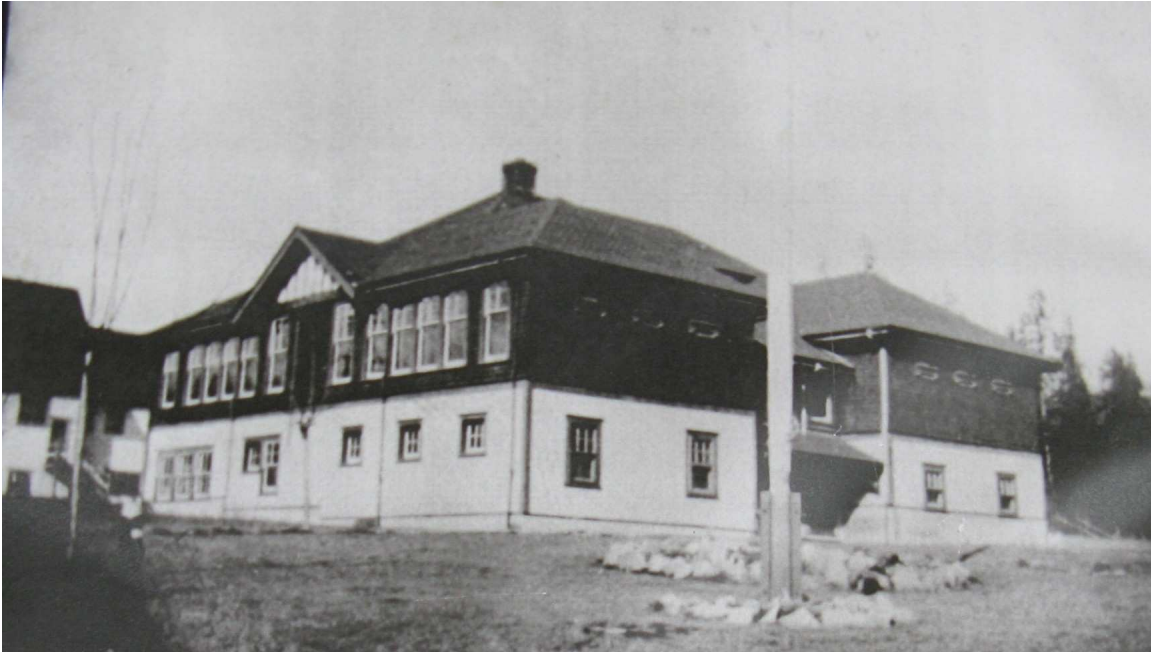
Chief Scott: They had to choose a name in common which would represent both Electoral Area B and the Village of Belcarra.

AAN: What did the Sasamat Fire Department look like away back then?

Chief Scott: It looked like any department starting off fresh with no practical experience. It only had a vision of where it needed to go and an uncertain path to follow to get there. When I started the halls were just built, one in each place. We had one purchased truck and had one donated truck. Then we received another donated truck.

We started with training from Port Moody, with equipment from IOCO. We did all that we needed to do. We were working off short-lived sirens, and it was very exciting time when we got high-tech pagers.

AAN: I understand that IOCO had residents and was a vibrant community back then?



Chief Scott: Yes. One of my first jobs as fire chief was to deal with a refinery fire which completely blew me away. It was a tank fire. When I got there, the Fire Chief from the refinery was there and he was on the phone back east. The IOCO corporate officers back east back were trying to tell us what to do.

My role was to know who I reported to and who sign the cheques. As the fire blazed, we were having a conversation about jurisdiction. In the meantime, it looked like the smoke was getting pretty toxic and I wanted the townsite evacuated. He said, "No we can't do that". I said, "Oh yes we can do that."

You must understand that when you evacuate somebody, you have to absorb all the costs associated with the evacuation. So if you had a budgie and it got away - new budgie.

The cost risks were huge but they did not outweigh the health risks. I ordered the evacuation because it was our jurisdiction. They weren't happy about it. The IOCO team got the fire out and the people came back, and no big deal. Shortly after that, IOCO refinery moved out of Electoral Area B and moved over to Port Moody. You connect the dots.

- When did you become the Fire Chief? What was your vision for the department at that time? What were the biggest barriers to achieving this vision? Do you think this vision has been accomplished?

I became chief 32 years ago. I had been working through the ranks and had a good idea of what was needed. I thought we needed proper Self Contained Breathing Apparatus; we needed modern equipment; we needed a more sustainable level of training; and we needed to do medical responses.

At that time, the trustees were made up of Council appointed representatives of the community. I would deal with their chairman and their point persons. When I came forward with requirements, we would be told that they didn't have the budget. This wasn't going to work for me. To change this, I believed that the persons who make the decisions on the mandate of the fire department, and then provide the tools to fulfill that mandate, should be elected officials. This way the trustees, not third-party appointees, would be accountable.

Moving to this type of governance was a milestone. The trustees became three Council members and/or the mayor from each municipality and a chair appointed by Metro Vancouver. That did it, it allowed us to say if this is what you want us to do you need to find the resources to do it. Mandate = resources.

From that point, there was a high level of respect and confidence in what was being presented, what was reasonable and fair. It worked both ways. I cautioned myself not to bring something just for the sake of asking but bring it forward based on fact and reason.

We would plan ahead, set up the reserve funds, and then we were able to buy the new fire truck or piece of large equipment based on what was needed and reasonable. I feel good about it the way it works here. Sadly, a number of chiefs in fire departments in other jurisdictions still have to play the shell game and are constantly chasing money to meet their basic needs.



- How would you describe the benefits of becoming a SVFD firefighter to a new recruit?

There's a real sense of pride and community at the Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department, a volunteer based organization that provides fire protection services to the Villages of Anmore and Belcarra, and obtains its funding and support services from GVRD.

Our success is built on what our people contribute. It's the time they volunteer to train and serve their communities.

There are up to 42 volunteers who respond to about 65 calls each year. Half the calls are medical - half are fires or non fires and include medical emergencies, car accidents, ground fires and house fires.

Sasamat firefighters are trained to the same standard of care and certification as firefighters in the rest of BC. They receive training on ladders, hoses, emergency first aid, auto extraction, bush fires and other related training or certification.

These are pilots, gas fitters, electricians, entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, housewives, even family members from three generations – who volunteer their time to the station and their community. It's a fun environment with a great sense of joy and camaraderie. This is an incredibly talented group of individuals who are proud to be called into action to intervene in a medical emergency or stop a fire to keep another person whole and improved.

