

Airdrie firefighters participate in annual stair climb challenge

BY SCOTT STRASSER
Staff Writer

Eight Airdrie firefighters' calves were probably feeling pretty sore on June 11, after participating in the ninth annual Firefighter Stair Climb Challenge the day before.

The yearly event saw hundreds of firefighters get a sweat on for a good cause as they ascended the 1,370 steps and 57 storeys at Brookfield Place – the tallest skyscraper in downtown Calgary – to raise money for an Alberta-based charity that supports people living with cancer.

Matt Elgie, president of the Airdrie Professional Firefighters' Association (APFA), said Airdrie's participation in the fundraiser this year came thanks to one of the members of the Airdrie Fire Department's most recent recruit class. She signed up to participate and then invited the rest of the recruit class and APFA to take part in the stairwell-climb as well.

"It was an open invitation to everybody, and those who were able to find the time on their day off joined up with her group," he said. "They trained together and have been prepping for this for quite a long time."

Airdrie's eight participating members also included Fire Chief Mike Pirie.

According to Elgie, the Airdrie contingent managed to contribute more than \$3,000 to the fundraiser's overall total, which will support Wellspring Cancer Support Alberta.

Elgie said taking part in a fundraiser that supports people living with cancer is meaningful for firefighters in particular, considering the high prevalence of cancer among people working in the firefighting industry.

"It hits really close to home for us, with the higher incidents of cancer among firefighters compared to the general public," he said. "It [also] falls in line with the high level of fitness we know our profession requires, and gives us an opportunity to challenge ourselves, both in training for it and the event itself."

Usually, the firefighters participat-



FITNESS FUNDRAISER – Eight Airdrie firefighters climbed to the top of Brookfield Place in downtown Calgary on June 10 to raise money for a cancer-support charity.

ing in the stairwell-climb don full personal protective equipment (PPE) during the challenge, including a self-contained breathing apparatus, a firefighters' helmet, boots, and fire-proof jacket and pants.

But this year, Elgie said the Airdrie firefighters deliberately chose not to wear their fire-proof jacket and pants. He noted this is due to recent revelations that the material that keeps firefighters safe from fire is coated with chemicals called polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). According to Elgie and truthinscience.org, PFAS is a carcinogen and actually exposes firefighters to hazardous chemicals.

"So because this was a cancer fundraiser and we want to preserve the health and wellbeing of our membership as much as we can, a decision was made to not wear all their PPE, because exposing themselves to that one more time – plus the times required for the training component – was not a good decision," he said.

Elgie added the International



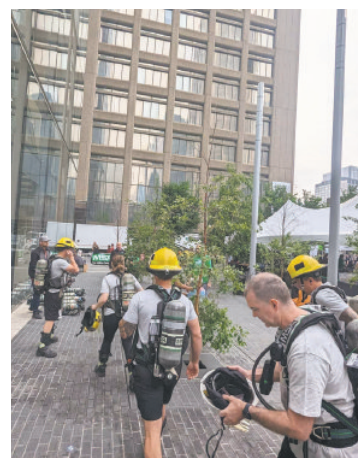
TOWER TOPPERS – The eight members pose at the top of the tower after climbing Brookfield Place's 57 storeys, or 1,370 steps.

Association of Firefighters (IAFF) is advocating for the development of a safer alternative to protect firefighters from both the extreme heat and toxic conditions they have to deal with when fighting fires, but also something that does not contain PFAS.

"We're hopeful in the near future, a safer alternative will be provided," he said "but in the meantime, the only option we have is something that protects us from the extreme levels of heat and other aspects of a fire environment, [but] equipment that carries toxicity with it."

The Firefighter Stairclimb Challenge has raised more than \$2 million since 2015, according to its website. This year's event has raised more than \$315,000, though donations can continue to be made until the end of June.

To read more about this year's Firefighter Stairclimb Challenge or donate to the cause, visit calgarystairclimb.com



STAYING SAFE – Instead of donning full PPE during the climb, (which would expose them to PFAS chemicals) the firefighters wore partial PPE, including helmets, boots, and a self-contained breathing apparatus on their backs.

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