



# LUCKIEST MAN IN THE WORLD

By **Brian Stecyk**

*Fire Chief Dave Balding gives thumbs up to his great job in Golden, British Columbia.*

**“I am the luckiest man in the world**—I do a job I absolutely love and I do it in one of the most beautiful places in the world!” exclaims Dave Balding, Fire Chief, Golden, British Columbia.

Located approximately 30 km west of the Alberta border on TransCanada Hwy 1, Golden is an all-season playground. Most people think of it as a service centre at the beginning of the Rogers Pass, but it is much more as the 8,000 regional residents will tell you. Seasonal visitors—summer and winter—swell the population to more than double.

Local residents work at the local sawmill or at providing services to area residents and visitors. People come from around the world to enjoy golfing, mountain climbing, hiking, parachuting, and amazing mountain biking or just

to enjoy the mountain paradise of the six nearby national parks (Banff, Glacier, Jasper, Kootenay, Mount Revelstoke and Yoho). Winter brings another adventurer—the skiers (downhill, heli, snowboarding) and snow machine enthusiasts to a winter wonderland of steep terrain and lots of snow.

Lots of people in the backcountry mean it’s busy for Golden Search and Rescue, the third largest in the province. Although they operate on their own, they do collaborate with the Golden Fire Department when required.

This year will be the 120th anniversary of the Golden Fire Department. The original 1898 bell of Golden Fire Engine Association still hangs in the current hall. When the original fire hall burned down, they operated out of

the basement of the Town Hall. Their current building was originally going to be a commercial building but was repurposed in 1974 as the fire hall.

Following careers at Malahat on Vancouver Island as firefighter and fire chief, and then as fire chief in Fraser Lake, Dave Balding arrived as the new chief in Golden in 2015. He is grateful for the legacy of former Fire Chief Ken McClure. "He left the community with an excellent and strong fire department," says Dave.

One of Chief McClure's goals was to have excellent equipment. Unfortunately he didn't get to see the new fire truck he had ordered. It arrived one month after his untimely death.

The Golden Fire Department covers an area stretching from the Spillimacheen in the south, to Field in the east and to about 100 km west along the Rogers Pass.

It is an exciting place for the 22 member fire department that includes two women. Their most frequent response

activity relates to motor vehicle incidents through the Kicking Horse Canyon and Rogers Pass (60% of calls). Traffic volumes often exceed 10,000 per day with about one-quarter being commercial vehicles. The Trans-Canada Highway is well-maintained but the combination of avalanches, occasional extreme mountain weather, and winter ice and snow with high traffic volumes creates lots of motor vehicle challenges.

Highway 95 going south of Golden through Radium, Invermere and Cranbrook to the US border is also a contributor to traffic problems. This past summer saw major traffic diversions north through Golden because of the forest fire situation and closure of Highway 93 which goes east of Radium to Castle Mountain Junction just north of Banff.

Interestingly the department has an excellent relationship with STARS Calgary. They are often called because they are closer than Kamloops which is at least an hour away. Each year the department is involved in a Fundraising Ball in Field where funds go to STARS and local EMS.

“I believe members always come first,” states Chief Balding. “As a department I want every member to be well-trained and supported by their families and the community. Their fitness and over-all health is extremely important. Fortunately we have developed a culture of fitness.”



*Training in the yard adjacent to the fire hall in Golden.*



*When you work in mountain country you have to be prepared for rescue on steep terrain.*

“I believe members always come first,” states Chief Balding. “As a department I want every member to be well-trained and supported by their families and the community. Their fitness and over-all health is extremely important. Fortunately we have developed a culture of fitness. Secondly, everyone believes in giving back—money is more a Thank You than a wage. We are part of a fire family—we build lasting relationships and we help people. And we know that when we are near a fire department we are never far from home!”

Distance is an obstacle to training so Golden has developed some of its own training resources. The fitness centre is well used by firefighters, their spouses and town employees and their spouses. Last year a training program was held that involved eight agencies working together. In-house training is primarily for skill maintenance while members have to travel for accredited courses. Currently 25 per cent of the team has completed 1001.

Dave exclaims, “The most dangerous phrase in the fire department is ‘we’ve always done it this way.’ There is a huge value in training that gets us out of our silos and expands our horizons.

Each municipality has to determine the level of protection they want their fire department to provide in accordance with the new BC Training Standards. There are three basic levels.

- Exterior Operations Level Firefighter;
- Interior Operations Level Firefighter; and
- Full-Service Operations Level Firefighter.

“We have excellent support from our municipal council and they have decided we would be a full-service fire department therefore our goal is to have our members trained accordingly. Our council has provided us with the necessary resources to accomplish that goal with equipment and training resources,” adds Chief Balding.

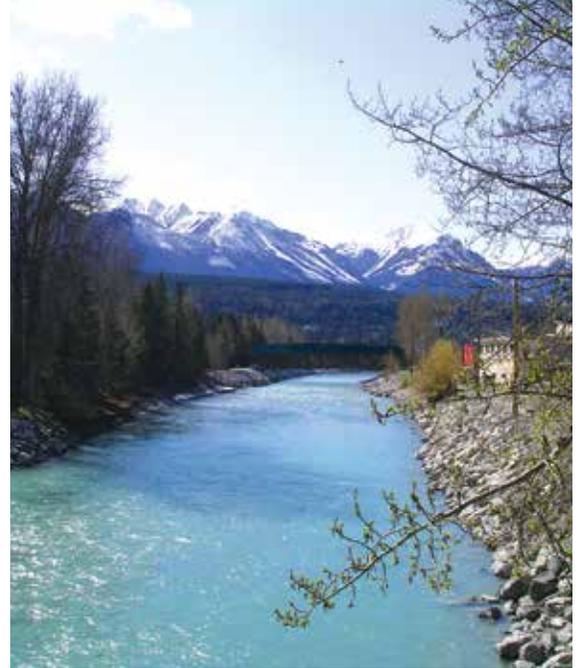
On a larger front, Chief Balding is very active in the BC Fire Chiefs Association where he has been involved in the Career and Volunteer sectors for over 10 years. Currently he is deputy volunteer director, zone director, and representative on the Worksafe Firefighter Association.

“We need active associations,” says Dave. “They are the bodies that can lobby and bring changes. Successes relate



*Caption to go here*

*Fire Chief Dave Balding and his crew posing with their historic fire truck.*



*The beauty of Golden attracts thousands of tourists and visitors every year. (Photo: Town of Golden)*

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to greater understanding of mental illness, presumptive cancers (12 are now recognized), and the work we are currently doing to have PTSD declared a presumptive illness. These are the issues that make me want to be a volunteer because by working together we can get a whole lot more done than we can on our own.”



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