



With a brand new, bright red coat of paint, this old St. Albert Fire Services aerial truck is now serving the people of Azogues, Ecuador. St. Albert firefighter Victor Fernandez and others from Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad facilitated the donation of the truck, and were in the South American city recently as it was officially unveiled.

PHOTO COURTESY VICTOR FERNANDEZ

Firetruck gets new lease on life

by **GLENN COOK**
Saint City News

A spot of paint here, a spit shine there, and the aerial fire truck looked as good as new — even if it was more than 7,000 kilometres away from its old home.

Victor Fernandez, a firefighter with St. Albert Fire Services and president of Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad, recently returned home from a trip to Azogues, Ecuador, where the fire department there officially unveiled their new truck — complete with a new, bright red paint job — donated by the City of St. Albert and facilitated by CAFSA.

Fernandez said he was filled with pride at seeing the truck given a new lease on life, but not as much pride as the firefighters it will benefit.

“This truck will have another 20 years over there. The weather is nice, and it’s their girl; they really take care of it,” he said. “They really take pride in it. Applications to become a firefighter increased in just one week because of that.”

“I felt really a feeling of [pride], not because of what I had done — and I said it in my speech when I went over there. This is not really Victor Fernandez; this is Canada. This is what Canada is all about. We’re known around the world for our richness, our standard of living, and how lucky we are. But we also share. We share our wellness. I happened to have the vision; I happened to say, ‘We can do this.’”

That pride extended to some rather unlikely people as well, like the machinist who fashioned a new nozzle for the truck after the old one broke while sitting in a salty sea port for three months.

“The guy who fixed the nozzle, he was the hero,” Fernandez said. “He said, ‘Everything is working because of me.’ And that’s what it’s all about. ‘Nobody likes me because I’m a mechanic, a machinist. I’m dirty. Grease monkey, they call me. But I’m the hero I fixed that. You will get water because I fixed that.’”

CAFSA has completed several missions to deliver firefighting gear to departments in places like Chile, Guatemala and Colombia since 2004, but this was the first time they had dealt with a fire truck.

And the hoops Fernandez had to jump to get it to Ecuador were almost too much to bear at times.

“I was pretty close to quitting quite a few times,” he said. “Enough is enough, you know. But you have to go beyond that. That’s what’s hard, going beyond that.”

But he is willing to do it again, as the organization has had a tanker truck donated from Drayton Valley and a fire truck from Lac Ste. Anne County, both of which will go to the fire department in San Pablo, Guatemala.

The tanker, Fernandez said, will be especially useful in the city and the communities that surround it.

“For 60 per cent of the world, the biggest problem is water,” he said. “So this tanker will do a community service. It will go to the communities and deliver water. That was the agreement, and that’s great public relations for the firefighters.”

The trucks are currently tied up in customs in Guatemala, but Fernandez expects they’ll be in the firefighters’ hands by August or September. CAFSA may also take gear to departments in El Salvador

and Chile by the end of the year.

Of course, the line of fire departments looking for help from the organization is long.

“I visited with probably 19 fire departments who came to see me, and each one of those departments want an aerial. ‘Can I have one too? Can I have one too?’ They don’t know what is behind this,” he said.

But what may help is the fact that CAFSA was recently granted charitable status by the federal government, meaning they can now issue tax receipts to donors.

Despite all the trials and tribulations, Fernandez said all the hard work is worth it.

“It tells us we’re doing good work, and it shows other fire departments who might potentially donate an aerial or a fire apparatus that we can do it,” he said.

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