

Klass' last call comes after 50 years with fire service

By Ginna Young

For half a century, lifetime resident Denny Klass spent his life on the Cornell Area Fire Department, before calling it a career at the stroke of midnight, Dec. 31, 2021. For 34 of those years, he was hailed as the fire chief.

Klass' father was on the department when the young family first settled in Cornell, so it was only natural to follow in those footsteps. When he first joined the department, Klass said he had good role models to help him learn the ropes, such as Denny Gingras, who taught Klass to remain calm and how to understand things.

Times have changed, as has equipment, which Klass is thankful that the department has all replaced and upgraded over the years, for not only safety, but ease. Klass remembers spending four to five hours after a call, cleaning and preparing the equipment to be ready for the next time they got called out.

And get called out they did – a lot – nights, weekends, holidays; it didn't matter if it was someone's birthday or anniversary, or if supper just got set on the table. Klass had to leave and leave in a hurry.

"So many times, on New Year's Eve or Christmas Eve, we got called out to a fire," said Klass.

However, Klass had a strong support in his partner for life, his wife, Cindie, who kept the home fires going and encouraged him through difficult calls. His sons also understood that Dad had a job to do to keep the community safe and that fishing would have to wait.

"Everybody was behind me," said Klass, adding that sometimes, his boys went with him to fire calls in the middle of the night after he got paged out. "I'd get out there and they were waiting in the truck for me."

Of course, over the 50 years on the department, there were good times and bad, but Klass fondly remembers one time, when there was a barn fire, that he had a load of wood on his pickup truck. Even though it was dark when he got home, he started unloading the wood into the chute, when he touched something that gave him quite a start.

"It's a goat's hoof," said Klass, laughing at the memory.

A few of his buddies on the department found the dead goat behind the silo at the fire call and decided it was too good a joke to pass up.

"I appreciate the camaraderie we've had between us," said Klass.

With 50 years under his belt, Klass was there long enough to see not only second generation firefighters on Cornell's department, but also third generation. His own sons followed in his footsteps, serving on fire departments in their respective towns.

Now that his last call came through, Klass is happy to put in time on the golf course and enjoy time with his family, but doesn't forget the connection he'll always have with the fire department.

"We have a lot of people who know things and how to keep it going, keep the cost down," said Klass. "This is what it takes to be a good fire department."



Photo by Ginna Young

Denny Klass, former Cornell fire chief, received many accolades June 4, for 50 years with the department, including his old, smashed hat that went under one of the truck's tires. New and former members toasted Klass on his retirement, and mayor Mark Larson personally gave a special award to Klass, for his many years of dedicated service to the community, wishing him a long and happy retirement. "You've done a wonderful job and we're all very thankful," said Larson.



Photo by Ginna Young

(To the right) Cindie Klass also gave decades of service to the community, as the Fire Department Auxiliary has been around for at least 40 years. Klass was on the ground floor when the Auxiliary started and kept the women's side of things going, while her husband, Denny, manned the firefighting side.

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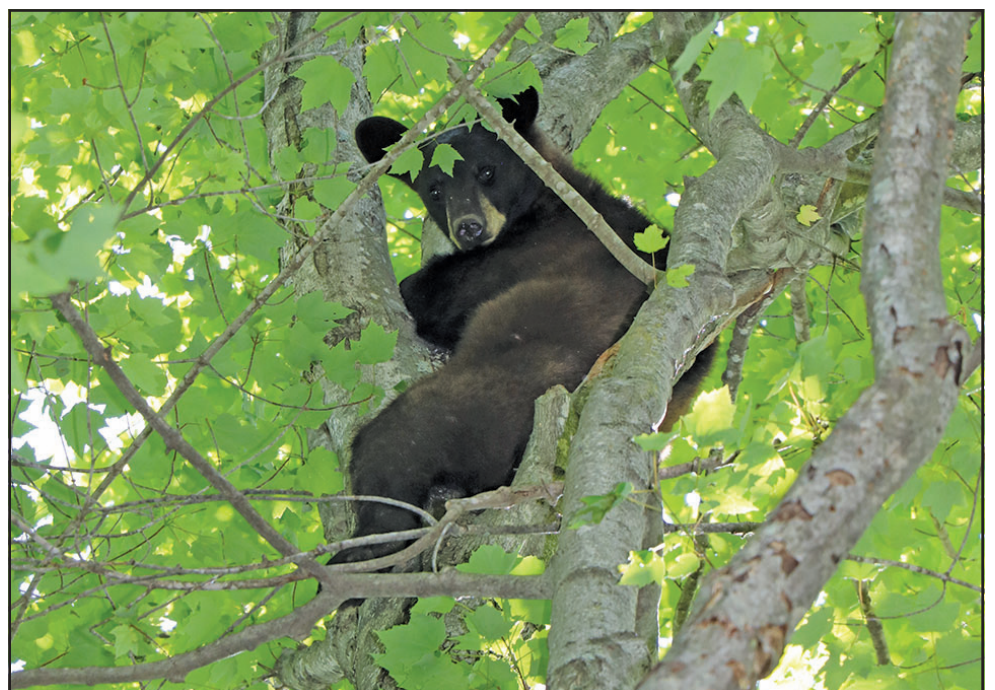


Photo by Ginna Young

Hanging out high in a tree June 7, on McIntyre Road in Cornell, a yearling bear cub waited for everyone to clear out so it could climb down, after a dog chased it up the tree. With bird feeders providing a food source, many bears and young cubs have been spotted around town this year.