

Hurled head-first into the Belly of the Beast

Phil Egan - July 2020

At first glance, one might assume that the two men most responsible for Sarnia's emergency response during the current pandemic were undergoing a considerable baptism by fire.

Both men were new in their jobs just as the global pandemic was invading the Imperial City. You'd think they were in for a crash course at the worst possible time.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

The county's senior health professionals, of course, take the lead in setting policy. But the two men entrusted by the city with implementing the battle plan bring formidable talents to their respective tasks.

David Logan, 52, took over on April 6th as Sarnia's new Director of Corporate Services. His multiple responsibilities in the newly-created position include information technology, customer service, human resources, communications, public relations and – as if that wasn't enough – community emergency management.

In announcing his hiring, Sarnia CAO Chris Carter described Logan as having “a proven track record.”

That, as it turns out, is quite an understatement. Clearly an overachiever, Logan's cool confidence is one of the first things you notice about him. Despite his youthful appearance, he has an impressive body of employee management experience with the Niagara Parks Commission, the Wellington Health Care Alliance, the Victorian Order of Nurses, and the City of Hamilton.

Fortunately for Sarnia in the midst of a global pandemic, David Logan also brings to the city twelve years of emergency management experience with the Government of Ontario.

He acknowledges, though, that battling a global pandemic has been “a unique experience for all of us.”

When COVID-19 began to emerge as a serious threat in late February, the Community Partners Primary Control Group (CPPCG) began what would eventually become daily meetings designed to construct the battle plan. This group consisted of staff and political leaders from the City of Sarnia, the Village of Point Edward, Aamjiwnaang First Nations, Lambton County Health and the County of Lambton.

The primary task of the CPPCG is gathering all of the relevant and rapidly changing aspects of the fight being taken at all three levels of government – county, provincial and federal – and using it to make decisions for the community.

Throughout the process, one man has been quick to praise what he describes as the “deliberative, collaborative and decisive leadership” of David Logan.

Ron Realesmith had taken over in late February as the Acting City Emergency Measures Coordinator, eventually reporting to Logan. Realesmith, 36, replaced former CEMC Cal Gardner following his long-delayed retirement.

Realesmith had been first introduced to emergency management eight years ago, when the then Sarnia Police Service employee was added to the Primary Control Group in an IT capacity.

Now permanently installed in the position, Realesmitve has become a key part of David Logan's fight to contain the pandemic.

Six years ago, Realesmith led the team that implanted the MyCNN emergency notification network of 54,000 telephone contacts in the city. This plan permitted the city to quickly notify residents of shelter in place and tornado warnings, boil water and other critical advisories. Less than a year later, the system was successfully utilized to locate a missing eight-year-old boy.

In 2015, Realesmith was heavily involved in the technical support leading to the evacuation of over 500 people following the Kenwick Place fire. Since that time, he has been continuously taking courses and becoming more and more involved in the emergency management program as he gradually emerged as the obvious successor to the now-retired Cal Gardner.

When the threat to the city from the pandemic was at its height, the team of Logan and Realesmith hastily organized the construction of a field hospital at Lambton College to deal with the threat.

“Despite the years of training I had prior to taking on this position,” Realesmith says, “protocols for this scale of pandemic have been written on a day-to0day basis.”

But with the now battle-tested team of David Logan and Ron Realesmith, the city appears to be in good hands.

