New Belmont Fire Station Borne of Community Pride

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(PHOTO) By ROGER AMSDEN Union Leader Correspondent

BELMONT - The Belmont Fire Department has its dream home. Thousands of hours of work by firefighters and community volunteers, coupled with donated construction material and $120,000 from residents and businesses made the department's dream a reality.

Fire Chief Albert Akerstrom sat in his office recently and joked that the new space is so overwhelming, "I have to close the door to the office to remind me of what it used to be like."

The department recently moved into its 10,500-square-foot station near the junction of Route 106 and Route 140. Work on the structure is proceeding, but the department is fully functional. An open house is planned for July 23 to celebrate the project's completion.

The station is built along the lines of a $1.2 million public safety building proposal which was narrowly rejected by voters in the late 1980s. When a subsequent vote showed support for the project slipping, firefighters and volunteers launched a fund drive to put up the building. That fund drive started in 1991 and ground was broken last year. The building was erected without any direct expense to taxpayers and was completed with about $120,000 in cash contributions.

"All the rest came from donations of labor and equipment. I've got to give a lot of credit to all the members of the department who put in all those hours to put this up and especially to those builders and contractors who helped us. It was just unbelievable. We worked under their guidance on nights and weekends for the last year to put this building up," said Akerstrom.

Deputy Chief Rich Siegel said construction began in earnest a year ago and that the turning point came last November when the roof went on. "We put up 98 trusses and 400 sheets of plywood in a day and a half. That was quite an achievement for the people who had been working on this, and we knew then that it would be ready to move into in six or so months."

"A lot of the workers are now getting a chance to spend some time with their families again," said Akerstrom, noting that for many the days began at 6 a.m. and lasted until 11 at night. Everyone who worked on the project has a special feeling of pride in what has happened.
"We’ve had nothing but good comments," said Siegel, adding that the new building has become a symbol of community pride and resourcefulness.

The **Belmont** Police Department will also benefit. Plans are under way to convert the former Fuller Street fire station site into a new police headquarters, allowing the department to move from its cramped quarters in **Belmont** Town Hall.