Schmitz Steps Aside After Decades Serving the Community
Bloomington Native Spent 25 Years in Edina, Including the Last Seven as Fire Chief

BY DAN REISIG

Like many children in the 1970s, Tom Schmitz would often come home from school and turn on the television to watch one of his favorite shows, Emergency!

Unlike actors Randolph Mantooth and Kevin Tighe, though, Schmitz’s involvement in saving lives spanned five decades, culminating with his retirement as Edina’s Fire Chief in February.

After graduating from Jefferson High School in Bloomington, Schmitz joined the U.S. Air Force as a medic. His training, combined with the lessons instilled by his father, John, helped set the stage for his career.

“My father taught me a lot about dedication, and followership, which you also learn in the military,” Schmitz explained. “As I progressed through my career, I was always mindful of not only trying to make myself successful, but making sure people above me are successful. If they’re successful, I’m successful.”

After leaving the Air Force, he returned to Minnesota. Schmitz juggled jobs as a 911 paramedic and respiratory therapist while studying at St. Catherine’s University. His introduction to the fire service came when his brother handed him a flier and urged him to join Eden Prairie’s Fire Department as a volunteer.

Another seminal moment in Schmitz’s career happened in an ambulance garage in the early 1990s. He was a few years into his career with North Memorial Health, approaching a shift change. A colleague handed him a job listing for a paramedic/firefighter with the City of Edina.

“He said, ‘You need to apply for this job, because this is you.’” Schmitz explained. “So right away, I went home and applied, because it was the ‘golden ring.’”

Schmitz earned the lone opening and rose through the ranks, helping the City modernize its technology, establish its Special Operations program and form strong bonds with the community.

Schmitz began full-time work in Eden Prairie in 2011 as Assistant Fire Chief. But three years later, the opportunity to return to the “golden ring” presented itself as he was named the City of Edina’s Fire Chief. He connected with the City on a new level, serving on the Executive Leadership Team and interacting with the City Council in addition to his staff and residents.

“In addition to the conventional responsibilities of Fire Chief Tom has, which are substantial, he also has management responsibilities for our Building Inspections and Community Health divisions. He has been able to integrate those services into the overall public safety services of the City very effectively,” said City Manager Scott Neal.

“That takes a unique set of leadership skills to pull off. Tom has those unique skills, and our City is better off for it.”

“Being a part of the executive leadership and helping to guide and mold and set the future of the organization, we’ve done some great things in my seven years,” Schmitz said, highlighting staff expansion and equipment upgrades.

While retirement will bring the end of the 3 a.m. pages and hours out in the cold, Schmitz will continue teaching fire and rescue techniques, a passion of his, and travel with his wife, Ann, once the pandemic subsides. Soon after retirement, Schmitz will make his annual solo winter trip to the Boundary Waters for some time in nature, off the grid.

But after a lifetime serving the community, he was asked what part of the job he will remember most fondly.

“That answer is easy,” Schmitz said. “It’s the interactions with the people. My colleagues, my coworkers, and at the chief level, not just the department, but City-wide. And relationships with the community; that’s what I’m going to miss the most.”

A national search is underway to replace Schmitz.
The City of Edina Development Tracker includes reconstruction or new construction projects that have been completed in the past six months, are currently under construction, have filed a formal application to the City or have been substantially approved.

View the Development & Construction Tracker online at bit.ly/LearnAboutProjects
The Sound on 76th
Location: 4100 W. 76th St.
Developer: The Sound on 76th / AEDN
Status: Under Construction
After removal of notable artwork, the building that once occupied FlyteTyme Studios and later the Minneapolis Media Institute was demolished. A four-story apartment building with 80 units of affordable housing and underground resident parking is being built on the site.

Our Lady of Grace expansion
Location: 5051 Eden Ave.
Status: Under Construction
Expansion and improvements to be done in phases include a new priest residence, new activity center, expansion of the school and parish gathering space, and remodeling areas of existing buildings.

The Lorient
Location: 4500 France Ave.
Developer: Orion Investments, LLC
Status: Completed
Vacant buildings were razed and replaced with a four-story, 45-unit luxury apartment building with 6,500 square feet of restaurant and retail space.

The Millennium at Southdale
Location: 6550 Xerxes Ave. and 3250 W. 66th St.
Developer: Luxe Residential
Status: Under Construction
This development project is being built in two stages. The previous office building at 3250 W. 66th St. is being replaced with a six-story, 227-unit apartment building. Occupancy is anticipated this spring. In a future phase of development, the office building at 6550 Xerxes Ave. will also be razed and a five-story, 148-unit apartment building will be built. The project includes underground and surface parking.

Shoppes at Estelle on France
Location: 6950 France Ave.
Developer: Luigi Bernardi & Edward Farr Architects
Status: Completed
The office building was razed and replaced with a four-story, 45-unit luxury apartment building with 6,500 square feet of restaurant and retail space.

Bower Apartments
(Previously known as Promenade Residences)
Location: 3650 Hazelton Road
Developer: Greystar
Status: Under Construction
The new building will be 18 stories with 185 dwelling units and underground parking. It features a variety of unit sizes, including “micro” units.

Edina Flats
Location: 4416 Valley View Road
Developer: McGlynn Partners and City Homes
Status: Completed
The project includes 15 luxury condominiums across four buildings that are each two or three stories tall. All buildings have elevator access and indoor parking.

Amundson Flats
Location: 7075 Amundson Ave.
Developer: MWF Properties
Status: Under Construction
The vacant dry-cleaning facility has been razed and is being replaced with a new four-story building that features 62 units of affordable workforce housing. Parking will be underground.

70th & France Ave.
Location: 7001 and 7025 France Ave.
Developer: Orion Investments, ESG and Mortensen
Status: Approved
The existing office building and bank will be torn down and replaced with a one-story U.S. Bank building with a drive-thru; a 24-story building with 270 apartments and 5,000 square feet of retail space; a 10-story building for offices and retail; and a nine-story building for 110 apartments. The bank will stay open during construction, which will be done in four phases starting this spring with expected completion in 2025.

Pentagon Village
Location: 4815-4901 W. 77th St.
Developer: Hillcrest Properties (Pentagon Revival) and Solomon Real Estate Group
Status: Under Construction
The 12-acre parcel is being redeveloped in multiple phases. Phase 1A is complete and includes site work, new retail space and parking, along with a new plaza space. Future phases are intended to include additional retail space, two hotels and new office space. Construction of future phases is uncertain at this time.

M Health Fairview Southdale Hospital addition
Location: 6401 France Ave.
Developer: Pete Salmond/M Health
Status: Under Construction
M Health Fairview is building a two-story addition above the existing second floor of Fairview Southdale Hospital. The expansion will add 52 inpatient rooms on the new third and fourth floors as the hospital transitions from semi-private (doubles) rooms to more single-patient rooms.

Hankerson Townhomes
Location: 5132 & 5136-5148 Hankerson Ave.
Developer: Donnay Homes Inc.
Status: Under Construction
A house and a two-story, four-unit apartment building are being removed and replaced with two four-unit townhomes that are 2½ stories tall. The plan includes green space and preserving trees on the south side of the property.

Valley View Apartments
Location: 4425 Valley View Road
Developer: DJR Architects
Status: Approved
The existing one-story day-care building will be razed and replaced with a three-story, 21-unit market rate apartment building with 32 underground parking stalls.

UPCOMING EVENTS
March 1-31
Winter Wellness: March Madness
This challenge is designed to help develop mindful and healthy habits, reduce stress and stay active! Complete the March Madness Challenge during the month of March and you could win prizes. Learn more at EdinaParks.com.

Tuesday, March 2, 7 p.m.
City Council meeting, Virtual

Wednesday, March 3, 7-8 p.m.
Town Talks: Organics Recycling, Virtual

Organics Recycling Coordinator Twila Singh will continue the City of Edina’s “Town Talks” with a virtual discussion. Hosted by City Manager Scott Neal, the Town Talk will start with a formal presentation on the goals of the City’s organics recycling program and statistics from the first year of collection. An open forum will follow.

Monday, March 8
International Women’s Day

Wednesday, March 10, 7 p.m.
Planning Commission meeting, Virtual

Thursday, March 11, 7:30 a.m.
Housing & Redevelopment Authority meeting, Virtual

Tuesday, March 16, 7 p.m.
City Council meeting, Virtual

Thursday, March 25, 7:30 a.m.
Housing & Redevelopment Authority meeting, Virtual

Monday, March 29
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Watch City Council, Housing & Redevelopment Authority and Planning Commission meetings live:
- Edina TV (Comcast Channels 813 or 16)
- Facebook.com/EdinaMN
- “Watch a Meeting” web page at EdinaMN.gov/LiveMeetings
Watch other meetings live at youtube.com/EdinaTV.
For a complete listing of meetings and events, visit EdinaMN.gov.
City Begins Plans to Reduce Local Speed Limits

Limit Will be 25 mph on Most Edina Streets

The City is working to reduce local speed limits citywide.

Since August 2019, Minnesota cities have had the authority to set speed limits on streets they control. The current speed limit on most Edina streets is 30 mph.

“Lower speeds reduce the likelihood and severity of motor vehicle crashes and setting lower speed limits prioritizes the safety of the most vulnerable users – pedestrians and cyclists,” said Transportation Planner Andrew Scipioni.

The City’s Engineering Department began public engagement on the topic in October 2020. The Transportation Commission reviewed comments received and the staff recommendation in December 2020. Staff recommends the City lower speed limits to:

- 25 mph on the majority of local streets
- 30 mph on four-lane major streets and other major streets with high non-local traffic

The speed limits of 20 mph on major streets within School Zones, 15 mph on minor streets within School Zones and 10 mph on alleys will not change.

Speed limits on streets owned by other jurisdictions will remain as they are, unless changed by those agencies, which include the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Hennepin County and private streets.

At its Feb. 17 meeting, the City Council received the public engagement report and authorized staff to develop an implementation plan to reduce local speed limits.

In other business last month, the City Council approved a:

- Professional services agreement with paleBLUEdot to lead development of the City’s Climate Action Plan.
- Contract with the Center for Energy and Environment to provide up to 200 Edina homeowners a year with free visits from the Home Energy Squad for home energy efficiency assessments.
- List of “Days of Significance” to acknowledge and celebrate the racial, cultural and religious diversity in Edina. The City will use social media and its other communications to acknowledge Black History Month, Lunar New Year, Women’s History Month, International Women’s Day, Holi, Easter, Ramadan, Days of Remembrance, Pride Month, Juneteenth, Ashura, Indigenous Peoples Day, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, in addition to holidays and religious observances already on the City’s calendar.

The City Council will next meet virtually 7 p.m. March 2 and 16. For more information, visit EdinaMN.gov.

– COMPILED BY JENNIFER BENNEROTTE