

community forum

Insurance agent says East St. Paul is like home



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Over the years, most of us in East St. Paul have had the opportunity to climb the steps of our local insurance agency, where we have been greeted by Breezy, the agency's director of greetings (DOG).

Breezy is the 14-year-old companion of One Insurance's branch manager Collin Bell, and both have been fixtures in our community for some time.

Breezy came into Collin's life when, back in the late '90s, a Middlechurch client came in with a stray he had found. Signs went up and the dog was brought into the office every day just in case someone came to claim him. No one did and now Breezy holds his lofty position on an office chair just outside Collin's office.

Bell began his work life in industrial sandblasting, a far cry from an office job. In the late '80s he was approached by the owners of Birds Hill Insurance, Jan and Michael Lapka, to come and help out in February, when Autopac renewals were due. He agreed, and, in 1990, began working there full-time and furthered his career by earning the chartered insurance professional designation.

In 2006, the business was sold to McMillan Insurance. Later, in 2010 all the offices were



Photo by Cher Hebert

Collin Bell and the staff at One Insurance. Breezy, the director of greetings (DOG) is hard to miss.

amalgamated under one name — One Insurance. Name changes and ownership aside, Bell remained here in Birds Hill, leading his staff of four.

Collin lives in North Kildonan with his partner Jennifer and daughters Stephanie, 17, Jessica, 11, and Breezy.

During our meeting, he said that he feels like a resident of East St. Paul because of all the time he spends here and all the locals he knows. He admits that a quick trip over to Sobeys can take him half an hour because there are so many people to chat with. Our own RM frequently calls Bell for his opinion on issues and he has volunteered on many committees.

I asked Collin what the craziest thing he has experienced in his career might be. He told me about a customer who apparently had a beef of some sort with MPI. The man came in to make his Autopac payment and presented Collin with a cheque — written directly on a cinder block. Collin said he had no choice but to take it over to the credit union and deposit it.

A very nice man with a kind heart and a sense of humour, we hope Bell will remain part of our community for a long time.

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