

BROCK'S BANTER: Get this party started

By Brock Weir

If you're planning a big party, sometimes you simply can't wait to get the fun started.

Apparently this was the case for many people in the Greater Toronto Area, including Provincial lawmakers and other notables, last Wednesday afternoon as they gathered to celebrate the Queen's 90th Birthday, 24 hours before the big day arrived.

The birthday party was held at Toronto's Chelsea Hotel with the Governor General of Canada, David Johnston, and his wife, Sharon ? as well as former Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario James Bartleman ? in attendance.

It provided the opportunity for people to celebrate the Queen's milestone birthday with a bit of panache, as well as record a video tribute to Her Majesty which, at some point, will be bound for the Palace.

At the event, the Governor General approached the podium to pay a personal tribute to the woman he represents.

?We're here today to celebrate an important anniversary,? said the Governor General, telling us something we already knew, but providing a great soundbite to the bank of news cameras in the centre of the ballroom. ?Her Majesty is renowned for her unwavering dedication to the Crown. Her dedication to detail is real [along with] her sharp wit, her ability to connect with the people she meets, and to inspire respect. But perhaps the quality I admire most is her selflessness, her altruism, and her ultimate belief in the decency of people.

?The Queen has lived her life according to deeply-held beliefs, influenced by her family and her faith. She frequently touches upon themes of tolerance, children, the goodness of people and helping those in need. It is this inherent goodness of our Queen that I think inspires so much admiration.

?Her Majesty has seen the world at its very best and its very worst. She has grown with the advent of technology and the 24-hour information age. In front of the world, she not only became a Queen, but a mother, grandmother, and now great-grandmother, and a lot has changed in 90 years.

?As HRH the Prince of Wales said of Her Majesty on the occasion of her 80th birthday, Her Majesty is an example to so many of service, duty and devotion in a world of sometimes bewildering change and disorientation. 10 years after these words were spoken, the Queen is still setting an example for all of us to follow.?

The Governor General's words were, perhaps, nothing about the celebrated lady we hadn't already heard before, but they were founded in a unique perspective that so few Canadians have.

He has seen the Queen operate firsthand, represented her around the country when she is not here and has, undoubtedly, received pearls of wisdom from The Boss he continues to keep close to his chest.

Nevertheless, they were words that stayed with me early the next morning when I set my alarm to watch coverage of the Queen celebrating her birthday with Prince Philip and a few thousand of her closest friends on the streets of Windsor. (Don't judge.)

The event attracted the attention of people young and old, including healthy contingents waving flags from Canada, New Zealand and other parts of the Commonwealth.

The reception was essentially rapturous and I couldn't help but reflect on the Governor General's insight the previous day on her ability to connect with people, inspire respect, the admiration she inspires.

That was evident in spades, but how does she do it?

The themes of tolerance, the value of children, the goodness of people, and helping those in need, as the Governor General indicated, are common threads the Queen has espoused over her milestone reign. But, they are touchstones of just about anyone in the public eye.

They are spouted ad-nauseum by any number of politicians. After all, aside from the Republican frontrunners in the United States, how many people in the public eye are going to offer the people messages of intolerance, ignoring the value of future generations, helping one's fellow man, and highlighting the lousier aspects of human nature?

The interesting thing is when a politician offers these words to the citizens, they are often met with skepticism, sometimes well-founded skepticism, and even a derisive eye-roll or two. But this is not the case with the Queen

I think it is a safe bet that these are themes our Head of State genuinely does take to heart and are the foundations of how she has tried to live her life and serve the people of the United Kingdom, Canada, the other countries in which she is Queen, and the Commonwealth at large.

Collectively, we have had longer than just about any other nation ? with the exception of Thailand ? to wait for the veneer to fall away. It's going to be a long wait.

And that is because the Head of State is not a politician.

Arguments are, of course, to be had on the merits ? or lack thereof ? of having an elected Head of State, but if our present Head of State was an elected individual, someone who was elected on a specific mandate, selling a bill of goods that might prove over time either true or false, and someone who came into a job with a Hefty Bag of baggage, masters to serve, and interests to maintain, those very qualities would bring about that eye-roll in many quarters.

But we have had the benefit of seeing our Head of State live these core values every day in a reign that is rapidly zeroing in on 65 years. That in itself is a remarkable achievement, but what is even more remarkable, there has never been along the way any doubt that these values are true.

These points are also helped driven home by the remarkable people who represent her here on the Provincial and National Stages. On Sunday, for instance, Aurora's Queen's York Rangers hosted Ontario Lieutenant-Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex for a Change of Command ceremony for the Regiment.

Her presence at the ceremony not only provided a great boost to our locally based servicemen and women, but also to our cadet corps who are working diligently to fund their trip to Vimy Ridge next year to mark the 100th anniversary of what is perhaps Canada's most storied ? and definitive ? wartime battle.

In her remarks, the Lieutenant-Governor helped paint a human and approachable face on the work the Regiment does as well as its ties to the crown, reflecting the very threads the Governor General tied to the Queen.

At the age of 90, I think we can all agree we're in the twilight of what will be looked at as a remarkable period in our collective history. In the lead-up to the birthday celebrations, the continuation of this was emphasised by Prince Charles, Prince William and young Prince George. The message was the image and values the Queen has worked to foster ? and continues to foster with a vigour defying her years ? is in safe hands.

Thanks to the citizens who represent her within Canada, these principles are in safe hands here as well.