

Central York Fire Services pay tribute to fallen at annual awards ceremony



By Brock Weir

It is often a time for celebration, but the 2014 Recognition Awards hosted by the Central York Fire Services (CYFS) last month took on a sombre tone as firefighters and local dignitaries paid tribute to those impacted by the shootings in Ottawa just the day before.

Attended by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Aurora Councillors John Abel, Evelyn Buck and Wendy Gaertner, and Newmarket Councillors Dave Kerwin, John Taylor and Jane Twinney, the ceremony recognized not only the long-standing service of individual firefighters, but new hires to the force, and people working behind the scenes to keep the CYFS going.

Beginning with a moment of silence for Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent and Corporal Nathan Cirillo, thoughts to the families of the two soldiers were echoed by Councillor Twinney.

?This past week has been a tragic one,? she said. ?It makes me think first about the first responders in our community, such as yourselves. We go about our days, many of us just expecting that you will be there when we need you, whether it is a 911 call, or a fire or medical emergency. On this day, I would like to thank you and your families that stand by you?working to keep us all safe.?

While some considered how Wednesday's events changed the Canadian landscape, Mr. Ballard said although methods of fire prevention and protection might have changed over the last two centuries, one thing that has remained a constant is the ?dedication and determination? of firefighters to help the communities in which they serve.

?I have friends who are firefighters and I like to tell them there is a word for someone who willingly walks into a burning building,? said Mr. Ballard. ?They think they know what that word is, and it is probably the same word we would use for paratroopers who throw themselves out of perfectly good airplanes, or as was demonstrated yesterday by police officers and security who run towards gunfire. The word I use is brave, and dedicated, and trained, and overall fantastic.?

Mr. Ballard also spoke of his experience this past spring during the fire at Aurora United Church when members of the CYFS, as well as numerous fire departments from across York Region, descended upon Yonge and Tyler Streets to help extinguish the blaze.

?I was stunned to see the effort the fire services from all over the area went to [in order to] do their best to extinguish that fire,? he said. ?I think there was a collective gasp at one point as four firefighters were on the roof and they broke a window, went inside to see if they could attack the flames from the inside and a few minutes later they came out again. All the citizens thought to themselves just how proud they were to be served by that type of fire service. It was absolutely outstanding.

?After the fire was out, after the building was down, and after the grass was growing, the fire service was still there [at a community barbecue]. It really demonstrates that firefighters go beyond the call of duty. They do more than come to our house when we have a medical emergency. They do more than extinguish fires. They really are a part of the community. They really are community builders.?

Those honoured with the 2014 Recognition Awards included medals marking 30 years of service from the Federal and Provincial Honours Systems to Deputy Chief Robert Comeau, Captain Al Weddel and firefighter Murray Blight. 25 year medals were awarded to Captain Rod Beckett, Inspector Joyce DiClemente, Ken Gibb, Steve McNaught, Chris Palmer, Mark Robinson and Kevin Saxton. Recognized for 20 years were Captain Peter Werry and Brad Fairbass, while Tom Hunter was promoted to Captain.

?We all know to be successful there are certain qualities we must have: we must have commitment, we must have dedication and we must have passion,? said Fire Chief Ian Laing.

?We all have to strive to be better at what we do. We have to be the people that other people want to aspire to. We all know in a world there is lots of change. There is an old saying that in the fire service you have 200 years of tradition unimpeded by progress. That is the furthest thing from the truth it could be.?