

Distinguished life of Ian Laing celebrated at CYFS dedication ceremony



The 'distinguished' life of Ian Laing, former Chief of the Central York Fire Service, was celebrated in Aurora on Saturday morning at the re-dedication of Station 4-5.

Now known as the Ian Laing Headquarters, the September 21 ceremony honoured the life and legacy of Laing, who died suddenly last fall.

The completion of the former Station 4-5 marked the first fire station to be built jointly by the Towns of Newmarket and Aurora since the consolidation of fire services in 2002.

The ceremony, which was attended by representatives from Municipal, Regional, Provincial and Federal levels of government, was hosted by Laing's predecessor, Retired Chief John Molyneaux, and emotions ran high as dignitaries spoke to his service and in expressing appreciation to his widow, Deborah, for 'sharing' her husband with the community.

'I want to thank you again for lending our communities Ian for so many years,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas, the first dignitary to speak, addressing Mrs. Laing. 'Chief Laing dedicated his career to public service and safety and taught us all to lead with compassion. I truly consider it an honour to have worked so closely with him, including on this state-of-the-art facility. I saw firsthand just how passionate he was about getting the fire station built, something he considered a career achievement when he finally completed it. I really can't think of a more fitting way to honour him than by naming it the Ian Laing Headquarters. I also think it is perfectly fitting that [it is] also Central York Fire Services' training facility as we all know how passionate a mentor he was.

'From his humour to his empathy, to his fierce protection of his staff, he was the type of leader you were simply lucky to have. Above all else, he cared so much about this community and the people who live here and he touched so many lives. His impact is felt right through the ranks of Central York Fire Services, by staff at our respective Towns, and by members of both of our communities.

'The truth is we reserve naming facilities only for those who make the most significant and lasting contributions to our community and Chief Ian Laing truly did. He did so through his dedication to protecting this community, by ensuring Central York Fire Services continued to innovate, improve, and had the facilities, tools and personnel they need to keep us safe. He did so simply by being a leader who treated everyone equally, fairly, and with dignity.'

Newmarket Mayor John Taylor was next to speak, dedicating his remarks to Laing's character behind the resumé.

Chief Laing was a person who was values-based and a person of character. First, he brought passion. He brought such a passion for fire services and fire-fighting and the safety of communities with him to the job, you felt that every time you spoke to him. Ian was taken from us so suddenly and so tragically we didn't have a chance for his retirement. I want to say to Ian today that we thank you for what you did in building a team and keeping Central York Fire Services' strong. Understanding that passion, compassion, leadership, loyalty and positivity, will make a fire service be able to do its job so well. We thank you for this incredible structure that will lead this organization in a physical sense and really represents the two municipalities coming together. Thank you for the leadership you brought in protecting and providing safety to the communities of Newmarket and Aurora for so many years. Many people will never understand the contribution you made in their lives because it is often invisible, but it's meaningful and we thank you for that.

Tributes continued at the municipal level by Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland, who serves as chair of the Joint Council Committee (JCC), which oversees the governance of the CYFS. She hailed Laing as a remarkable individual whose courage, dedication and leadership left an indelible mark on the community.

As we stand before this building, it is only fitting that we recognize the legacy of our beloved late fire chief, Ian Laing, she said. I had the pleasure of working on JCC for the last six years, from concept drawings, budgeting, to finally watching this award-winning building come alive right before our eyes. This was a project Chief Laing was proud to open. By renaming station 4-5, we're not just commemorating one individual; we're also celebrating the spirit of community, bravery and service it embodies. Let this honour serve as both recognition of past achievements and inspiration for future generations. May we always strive to uphold the values Chief Laing has instilled us: teamwork, friendship, respect, and an unwavering commitment to our community.

Region of York Chair Wayne Emmerson, next to speak, saluted Laing as more than a firefighter and fire chief but as a leader, a mentor and a friend to so many.

His unwavering dedication to protecting our communities defines his career and his life. He truly embodied the spirit of service, courage and resilience that every firefighter aspires to. Today, we commemorate not just Chief Laing's years of service, but the immense impact he had on those around him. In naming this station in his honour, you're ensuring a lasting legacy and every member of the fire services will think of Ian when they're at this station. This station is a reminder of his dedication, leadership, and profound impact on our community.

The federal level of government was represented by Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen who, as one-time mayor of Newmarket, helped oversee the consolidation of fire services.

We could not have made a better choice, he said, recalling the hiring of Laing in 2010. He was a consummate firefighter. Dedicated and proud of his chosen career, and absolute in his regard to provide his community with the absolute best service. I will miss the sparkle in his eye and the stories told by a gentleman I was proud to call my friend. To his wife Deborah and your family, I hope that today's ceremony and naming reinforce for you the respect, gratitude and admiration of our community for Chief Laing. He would be honoured to know his name is proudly attached to this firehall.

At the Provincial level, Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy recalled her first visit to the fire hall where Laing proudly showed her every nook and cranny of the space with much excitement.

You know what was the most important? It was the twinkle in his eye and how his face just lit up when he was talking about the firefighters. How they dedicated their lives to the safety of our community members, she said, addressing CYFS members. This station is an amazing facility. However, it is truly about the women and the men who work here. It is all about you. You are Chief Laing's legacy. Thank you for all your courage, your leadership, and your empathy.

Added Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa: Chief Laing's legacy lives on through you, lives through the fire fighters who follow in his footsteps, and his headquarters, which will forever be recognized by his name.

Laing's successor, Chief Rocco Volpe, closed the ceremony with memories of working side-by-side with Laing over the last decade of his career.

?He was a visionary who was always one step ahead of everyone, finding ways to improve our service and keeping our firefighters and the people we serve safe. On a personal note, Ian and I shared many chats, going over all the details of the day's events, brainstorming for the future. We always had our green tea afternoons because it became our tradition and I always treasure the moments of reflection and our friendship. I can't forget Chief Laing's one-line zingers. He dropped them effortlessly, leaving the room in laughter. Try as I might, I have never been able to deliver them quite as flawlessly as he did but I'll keep trying.

?Every time we step through these doors will be a reminder of the standard he set, the impact he had and the difference he made in the lives of so many. Today, we do more than name a station ? we honour a great man whose service will continue to guide us, inspire us, and remind us why we do and what we do.?

By Brock Weir