

Laing: Leadership accomplished, excellence achieved, duty and honour fulfilled ? Solicitor General



If one looks back on the life of Central York Fire Services Chief Ian Laing, who died in his sleep on November 30, it is one of ?leadership accomplished, excellence achieved, tasks completed, duty and honour fulfilled, responsibilities and obligations met.?

Those were the words of Ontario Solicitor General Michael Kerzner who summed up a life well-lived at Laing's funeral, which was held at Newmarket's Ray Twinney Complex last Tuesday, December 12.

In a ceremony full of pomp and circumstance, Laing's remains were carried to the arena in an extensive procession of fire personnel from York Region and beyond, passing under a memorial arch created by two fire truck ladders, and piped into place as Premier Doug Ford, Kerzner, the Councils of both Aurora and Newmarket, and politicians past and present looked on.

Leading the tributes was Premier Ford, who said although he didn't have the privilege of knowing Chief Laing, ?it is clear from the stories I have heard, the outpouring of tributes, that he was loved and respected by so many people.?

?For almost five decades, Chief Laing courageously dedicated himself to the fire service, to the safety and wellbeing of others,? said Ford. ?His love for firefighting was indisputable. It was his passion, it was his life. He had the reputation for being a great leader, a mentor, and a coach to so many firefighters.

?He helped bring in new safety initiatives to Central York Fire Services and beyond to keep his brothers and sisters safe. Many remember him for his kindness and empathy. I am told he had a unique sense of humour, always quick with a one-liner to lighten the mood and to bring a smile to everyone's face. When asked about retirement in his 70s, he would say, ?Why retire when you love what you're doing every day?' Outside of work, Chief Laing had a need for speed. He loved his Harley Davidson, his Corvette, and adventures of the open road with his buddies and with his wife. To Deborah and to Chief Laing's family and friends, I want you to know that he will always be remembered for his dedicated service to our Province. He will always be remembered as a hero and thank you for sharing him with us.?

In his eulogy, Kerzner told Deborah Laing her husband's ?entire life was defined by defying long odds.?

?Just look at his journey. He was an example of how to live with purpose and it is not easy when a loved one lives a life of public service,? he said. ?Chief Ian Laing was an original. He was a good man, a man of character, a man who respected his profession deeply, and was respected equally in return. Central York Fire Services proudly serving Newmarket and Aurora were able to keep their community safe because of him.

?No adequate amount of comment or reflection could capture the true impact of the Chief, yet it is such reflection that helps us comprehend things that were important to him. His success was our success and his impact was broad and we know it. The Chief let us be a part of his incredible journey for almost 50 years??

This length of service was underscored by Newmarket Mayor John Taylor who said 48 years in the fire service was difficult to comprehend.

?48 years dedicated day in and day out to the service of others. 48 years of working with other firefighters whose personal safety depended upon the entire team working together and looking out for one another. 48 years of mentoring and guiding and serving. 48 years of personal sacrifice and personal risk for the benefit of all. 48 years of public service,? he said, noting that Laing wore the title of Chief with pride.

?To be a firefighter by its very nature is about giving back and Chief Laing believed in giving back, and Chief Laing believed in community. The Chief loved to participate in the Be a Hero event to support Pediatric Oncology at Southlake. I remember him volunteering to shave his head at the event and telling him that since he wouldn't let me shave his budget he should let me shave his head. He went on to shave his moustache for that event to support kids struggling with cancer, a mustache he had worn for his entire adult life. He had a big heart and he supported many events in the community because serving others was in his DNA.?

Next to speak was Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas who, as The Auroran reported last week, announced at the funeral that CYFS Station 4-5, one of the crowning achievements of Laing's career, would be dedicated in his honour next September.

?Chief Laing's passing is undoubtedly an enormous loss for our entire community. We have lost a true leader, a courageous public servant, whose mission is to protect and save lives and training and inspiring others to do the same,? he said. ?As we mourn, we also celebrate a remarkable man. We reflect on just how lucky all of us were to know Chief Laing for the husband, friend, mentor, leader and dedicated public servant that he was and how lucky we were to have him serving in such an important role in our communities. I know that everyone who knew Chief Laing was inspired by his passion and dedication to public service. Joining the fire service isn't just a career, it's a calling and Chief Laing answered that call with honour and poise. In his years with Central York Fire Services, he accomplished so much, strengthening the fire service and helping solidify it as the world class organization it is today.

?What always stood out to me was that regardless of who he was talking to ? a Mayor, a CAO, Councillor, or junior staff member ? he approached everyone as an equal. He asked questions about people's lives, their jobs, their families. He cared. He truly did. If you measure life's success by the way you treat others, then Chief Laing's life was a resounding success.?

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