

## York Region Police Male Chorus celebrates 25 years in community



By Brock Weir

Over a quarter century ago, they raised their voices to bring policing down to the community level and, last week, the York Regional Police Male Chorus celebrated 25 years of bringing the community together one song at a time.

Members past and present gathered at Oakview Terrace on Friday night to celebrate in style.

For founding member Lowell McClenney, it was a celebration of a community success story not just for local music, but also for local policing.

In the late 1980s, the Provincial Government came out with a report emphasizing community-based policing and police officers getting more involved at the local level. Mr. McClenney, a superintendent of the York Regional Police at that time, sensed an opportunity.

?People saw police officers in a car driving by, yet they weren't getting a personal communication with them,? he says. ?The government thought it was time that the police services developed some programs where they could get their men and women closer to the people they served. The idea came from my brother, Ted, who is a musician and he said perhaps a male chorus would be a way to get into the community.?

They had their first meeting in January of 1991 and the rest, as they say, is musical history, bringing together a good mix of police officers and community members alike.

?The police officers had a chance to work with the community and the community that was coming in to sing had a chance to work with the police officers. Eventually, that changed and police officers who were getting younger wanted to become more involved in sports than singing and left us with the need to get more community members. Now, we are mostly community members and about four or five of us are members of the police service.?

While their numbers have ebbed and flowed, they have performed 717 concerts around the world since the Chorus was formed, acting as ambassadors for York Region and the York Regional Police across Ontario, Canada, and the world ? recently, for instance, undertaking a goodwill visit to the United Kingdom. And Mr. McClenney has performed at 713 of those 717 concerts.

Of these 713, he cites the Chorus' participation in events like annual Police Memorials in Ottawa and Queen's Park among the highlights.

?It touches your heart, especially if you have been involved in policing, to be there and participate in memory of those who have

been killed in the line of duty over the years in policing,? he says.

Still, recruitment is a big task.

Much of their incoming members comes from word of mouth and recruitment from existing members. Those who are hesitating joining up, however, are missing a good thing, says Mr. McClenny.

?We are heading in the right direction,? he says. ?We are still out there entertaining. We're staying involved in the community and I hope it stays that way, although I won't always be here. I hope it stays in that direction and is focused on being closer to the community through what we are doing. Our goal was making the public more aware of their police service all over, not just in York Region, and I think we have done that. That is what they have tasked us to do and that is what we have fulfilled.?