

Retiring Fire Chief Jim Wall given heart-felt send-off

By Jim Stewart

In a sun-drenched dining room festooned with an array of balloons and accented with bunches of white tulips on navy blue table cloths, visitors filtered in to provide hugs, handshakes, gifts, and greetings to King Township's retiring Fire Chief Jim Wall at the Waterstone Estate and Farms on Saturday afternoon. The reception area and dining room provided welcome warmth from the frigid February conditions outside and the congenial Chief Wall mingled with hundreds of guests during the course of the three-hour reception. A video highlight reel of Wall's illustrious career in firefighting looped in the background. An official portrait was unveiled in front of a classic stone fireplace hearth. Aside from the presentation easel was another conversation starter: a special occasion cake that featured a yellow firehose wrapped around a numbered fire helmet with "Congratulations Chief Wall" stenciled on the realistic-looking firefighting implements. It was a joyous gathering on Saturday afternoon and Chief Wall observed that the best part of the reception was "being with friends and family." The veteran firefighter was taken by "the amount of positive energy in the room." "I'm so lucky to be surrounded by so many kind people. It's the most wonderful feeling I can have," Chief Wall reflected on his significant legacy as the leader of the King firefighters for thirteen years and noted that "We did change our staffing. We went from 105 between the three stations to over 150. We put in place a classification process and brought in so many candidates into full-time positions. We've been able to sustain this fantastic group of people and so many talented firefighters have joined the team." He also looked back at his 39-year career and felt that the most memorable aspect of a decades-long vocation was "the dedication of the firefighters and the level of service they provided to the citizens of both Richmond Hill and King Township." The amiable Chief was mobbed by dozens of friends and colleagues who politely interrupted our interview. He re-started our conversation by stating that "The best part about serving as the Fire Chief was being offered the level of responsibility to serve so many citizens. This kind of responsibility can never be taken lightly." A light moment nonetheless transpired when the Chief was presented "in one of his many interactions with guests" with a brand new weed-whacker by long-time friend Jason Watt. The weed whacker arrived with a story. Chief Wall explained in between chuckles: "I've known Jason since he was 15. I started cottaging with him a couple summers ago. We had a weed-eater that was killing me, especially my back when I was using it. The families at the lake are very close and Jason reminded me that this new weed-eater has a strap." After hugging the jokester Watt, Chief Wall went about his social responsibilities and reveled with those gathered at Waterstone Estate and Farms in the sunlit setting. It was evident that after 39 years of dedicated service to two York Region communities, the long-time Fire Chief was ready to ride off into the sunset and control weeds much more comfortably and effectively at the cottage this summer.