

Team work exemplified at annual Portraits of Giving



By Mark Pavilons

While individuals were singled out as 'giving' members of the community, it's truly a team effort that makes things happen. King showcased its newest recipients at the 9th annual Portraits of Giving celebration.

Presented by HJ Pfaff Audi and Merk Photography, 'Portraits of Giving' celebrates individuals from across nine municipalities in York Region who exemplify the importance of social responsibility.

This year's honourees were Robin Priestly and Fire Chief Jim Wall. Portraits representatives also presented a cheque for \$1,000 to the King Township Food Bank.

The exhibit travelled through York, and King is its final stop for the rest of the month, at the King Cultural and Heritage Centre. Mayor Steve Pellegrini pointed out there are many special people in our community, and all contribute to making King great. He stressed that Chief Wall inspires the entire force, which the mayor said the 'finest out there.' KFES engages the community in many ways and members are actively involved in community events and fundraisers, as well as supporting local things like the King Township Food Bank and Nobleton Christmas Drive. The chief said this recognition reflects directly on 'our fine service.' The team is out on the front lines making a difference.

After more than 22 years as a firefighter, Wall began working for the Township of King in 2008 as their first full-time Deputy Fire Chief.

Jim strongly believes in the following philosophy: remember where you came from (the past), where you are (the present), and always where you are going (the future). Staying grounded has helped Jim appreciate the amazing experiences during his fantastic journey.

King Fire and Emergency Services are actively reversing the stigma around what was known as traditional priorities; today's have been realigned accordingly. The first priority now is education (getting out in the community, meeting residents, and being proactive); the second is enforcement (with respect to fire and safety codes), and the third is suppression (the failsafe). Fire services' primary function continues to be protecting residents and their property, with core services focusing around education and fire prevention.

In 2011, Jim was the recipient of the Paul Jackson Award. This award is given annually to a fire department staff member who exemplifies the values, dedication, and commitment that Paul Jackson demonstrated.

Over the years, Jim has met many generous people who exemplify the gift of giving. He's confident that we all have a huge capacity to give more than what we think is possible. Jim recalls an invaluable message that former Fire Chief Bruce Jessop (deceased) often

imparted to him and others: your family always comes first, your job is second, and the fire department is third. Maintaining this work-life balance enables firefighters to get involved and reassures aspiring firefighters that it's attainable. Jim encourages all citizens to become engaged in their community, knowing they won't regret it.

The well being for seniors in his community is another cause that resonates with Jim. There is a new safety initiative involving a product called the Guide Light. When firefighters are on in-service inspections they have been installing these lights. More education and engagement in this area, and others, is planned for the future.

Past recipient John Ciarallo, of John's No Frills in Nobleton, highlighted Robin Priestly's story.

Robin Priestly is executive vice-president of Priestly Demolition Inc., and through their family business she has become active in the community on many levels, providing donations and participating in everything from golf tournaments to hospital galas. She has contributed their services in-kind to organizations such as Southlake Hospital and C.E.T.A. (the Care Enough To Act program led by Kenaidan Contracting Ltd). What she enjoys most about her role is the people she gets to work with every day.

Robin feels that it is very important for people to get themselves and their families involved in initiatives that interest them and can benefit others. There are many organizations, small and large, needing volunteers to help them carry out their cause. In our ever-evolving society of online communication and social media, sometimes the true art of volunteering can be lost. Getting out and spending time with kids, the elderly, and animals in need, can be extremely rewarding and nurturing to the soul.

Robin has also served on the board of directors for the Ontario Association of Demolition Contractors and the King Chamber of Commerce. Since 2012 she has participated in the Road Hockey to Conquer Cancer fundraiser for Princess Margaret Hospital, and in 2017, she repelled down City Hall in Toronto for Make a Wish Foundation.

Robin doesn't necessarily consider what she does as giving back; it is simply being community-minded. She feels tremendously privileged for the opportunity, the knowledge, and experience gained by being a part of countless amazing businesses and causes in York Region and the GTA.

Robin said giving back is a team effort, not an individual one. Priestly staff, she said, have always been on board and they love to get involved.