

Good Evening, Everyone

I have been asked to reflect upon some events of this past year, events that have marked the history of North Perth. For many, a single moment in 2011 has significantly changed their life, forever.

Is there a moment that you reflect upon, that embraces a character trait?

During the fire tragedy of Mar 17th and the week that followed are some of the moments I reflect upon most. Few people realize what a very close-knit group of dedicated men we have serving as ‘volunteer’ firefighters. They rely on each other, they trust each other, and they work together committed to their community.

That night, members of our North Perth fire department, with the assistance from our neighbouring fire detachments did what they were trained to do, they fought a fire.

But our North Perth men knew they had lost two of their own, and still stood shoulder to shoulder with each other to continue to fight the fire. Two men, two friends, two comrades, and still they continued to complete their mission as volunteer firefighters. Demonstrating perseverance, integrity, and courage. The courage we all believe we have, and hope we have, during difficult times, but are rarely given the opportunity to demonstrate even to ourselves. Those who encompass courage often reflect afterwards “I don’t know how I did it”, passing it off as instinct and training opposed to a trait within them.

As with all rural communities, when tragedy happens, the mass production of food came pouring in from Churches, community organizations and individuals. Receiving boxes of Kleenex and napkins delivered by a friendly familiar face who understood the need during this devastating time.

Under normal conditions, if a special Council meeting is called, it is the staff from our Clerks department that would contact members of council. But, this time, when it became necessary to call a special council meeting, try to picture this; together in a small room, one Councillor was googling Line of Duty Death on the internet, while 3 fellow Councillors were phoning their colleagues using their personal phones, requesting their attendance at a designated time, with one Councillor looking up the next number to call in the phone book. Your new council working together, on a day when it was truly hard to smile, it was the exhibition of responsibility, compassion and respect that sparked a brief giggle from our clerk when she entered the room. We all know men surely can’t multitask, but take my word for it, they can work as a team.

Meanwhile, The largest Irish festival in North America was in full swing! At the Friday night dance, in a crowded arena, with alcohol involved, standing shoulder to shoulder once again...but this time...nothing but silent respect.

”For his love of the Kinsmen...Ray’s wish would have been, and his families wish was, that the Paddyfest parade go as planned”. For the crowds that gathered, the tears of the people, and the empathy of our local news reporter that lowered his camera as Ray’s beloved Kin Family passed by. Truly the ‘saddest parade, I have ever been in...hands on hearts, compassionate waves...and I silently prayed for strength. Little did I know, that strength would be shown to me, forever imprinted on my heart. We had just turned the corner at the North Perth municipal office...and standing there together just past the bridge...the Walter family! Undeniably, incredible...courage, love, and perseverance demonstrated in a single moment.

The admiration and respect demonstrated by the sea of uniforms, arriving by the busload and the dedication by our recreation staff that transformed our local arena was heart felt. Along with the courage and honesty of those who spoke the eulogies, and that unforgettable moment when, with the innocence of a child, Jaxson carried grandpa's helmet out of the arena.

There were hundreds of volunteers, from all three wards, coming together to help in any way they could. Finally, in our 13th year as North Perth, everyone within our municipality came together and truly became a community.

Less than two months later on May 10th, our North Perth community had been struck by another tragic fire, claiming the life of one of our citizens.

How many of you felt empathy in that moment, for the family, and for the firefighters? To quote Chief Smith, "The firefighters did what they had to do, they proved their worthiness..."

Upon hearing of the loss to the Hamilton family, three optimistic students organized a fundraising barbeque and car wash in support of Laurie's family, along with more than 100 students volunteers. The students and community raised over \$10 000, with a never-ending line of vehicles, and every item used, donated by our local merchants and our people. That day more than half of the school students and hundreds of people from our community, came together in a show of support... We truly are better together.

Then, once again, attempting to recover from a shock nobody expected, the streets of Atwood and Listowel were dotted with purple ribbons, to mourn the death of a beautiful young woman. With her whole life to look forward to, undoubtedly she would have pursued a career that involved helping others. Candice embodied the meaning of fairness and inclusion; she encouraged others with her advice; "Be yourself and don't change for other people. You will find people who like you just the way you are."

By using only these few examples of moments in time, I hope you agree that North Perth in 2011 has truly become a community of character.

Everyone in our community has been touched in some way by these tragic events, and as a community we have come together to support each other, and will continue to do so. What moment do you remember that demonstrates a character trait? I hope that you add this moment to your list... Let this be the moment that the memory of Ray, or Ken, or Laurie, or Candice, forever inspires all of you, and reminds you to not just live in our community, but to be an active part of it.