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## Heroes honour heroes in inaugural First Responders Day

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By Brock Weir

Brian Hall was just nine when fate set out the course of his life.

It was Christmas Eve and the son of an alcoholic single mother had his life turned upside down when his mom, “feeling she couldn’t handle going into another year trying to raise a young child” attempted to end her life.

Decades later, Mr. Hall recalls vividly picking up the phone and trying to call for an ambulance in the days before 911.

“Everything after that will forever be engrained in my mind,” says Hall. “It will be engrained in my mind forever how well they took care of my mother, how non-judgemental they were of her. They took such great care of me on the way to the hospital with her that I remembered when I got to that career decision-making time, it was the first thing I thought about that I really wanted to do.”

35 years later, Mr. Hall is now Deputy Chief of York Region EMS. He was on hand Thursday at a special celebration honouring York Region first responders at the inaugural First Responders Day, spearheaded by MPP Frank Klees.

After being approved by the Ontario Legislature last year, the inaugural day included a special morning of celebrations at Queen’s Park, as well as at the local level. Here, celebrations shifted to the evening where York Region’s EMS, Police, and Fire Crews were feted by Mr. Klees and others within the community for the work they do for them.

It was recognition Hall described as an “awesome form of recognition” but the recognition is not something he and his crews strive for.

“There are a lot of things I have seen that deserve appreciation [but] they are a lot of the smaller things that all First Responders do at the end of the day that have made a big difference in somebody’s life, even if it is just an elderly person who lives alone and a First Responder comes to their house, makes them feel safe, makes them feel their needs are being met. It is interesting in our line of work that we can deliver a baby at the start of our shift in the morning and we can pronounce somebody dead at the end of the day.”

Over the course of his work, Mr. Hall says he is reassured every day that he made the right career choice after that fateful Christmas Eve when he was a child. So far, he has delivered 13 babies in the line of duty, something he describes as “probably the best thing you can do”, but he has seen more than his fair share of negative things as well.

“If I had to do it again, I would do it in a heartbeat.”

In his view, however, First Responders are not the true heroes, but the people they help every day, such as young children in distress or those who might be facing a long-term or terminal illness.

“Those are really the heroes,” he says.

One person who came out on Thursday night to honour First Responders might disagree. In 2009, Tattiana Pancho, an Aurora resident and Grade 11 student at Newmarket's Sacred Heart Catholic High School, was spending a great day at Wonderland when disaster struck.

After fainting, her father called 911 and after paramedics arrived, she was found to be suffering from a brain aneurysm. For her, there is no doubt in her mind the First Responders are heroes and they have inspired her, in turn, to pursue a career in nursing.

She set down her thoughts on the "Superheroes" that are first responders in an essay, which received first prize in a contest run by Mr. Klees.

"Thanks to First Responders, I was able to get to the hospital on time, they found out what I had and I was rushed to Sick Kids," she says. "It is really exciting to be here with the first responders."

Adds Tattiana's mom, Jacqueline Flowers: "For a long time, it was hard for Tat to relate to the experience because it made her so sad. Now, she realises it is more empowering than anything because now she has turned 360 from somebody who couldn't walk or talk, to being back to being just as normal as everyone else.

"This day means a lot. I am the ex-wife of a police officer, so I know exactly what they go through. It is the recognition they really do need to have. It is not just from a hero standpoint, but just from the standpoint that people should know who they are and what they actually do for us all year and all over."

