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From retirement ceremony to wedding vows: Legion hosts dual celebration

By Joshua Drakes, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Andrew Horvath came to the Shelburne Legion Branch 220 for a retirement celebration, but left as a married man.

After years of dedicated and heartfelt service to the Royal Canadian Air Cadets in Shelburne, Capt. Andrew Horvath is retiring from his leadership role and returning to civilian life. Horvath had worked with the cadets for 10 years, putting off his retirement until he was forced to due to rules regarding service age.

That didn't mean they were going to let him go quietly, however. Horvath was honoured by the cadets, the Shelburne Legion, veterans and the general public on April 9 with a retirement ceremony held at Branch 220's building in town.

Capt. Horvath fought back tears as he addressed the room of guests and his cadets.

?I'd really like to thank all of you for coming,? he said. ?Thank you for all your support. You guys are my adopted sons and daughters. I'll be back as a CI (civilian instructor). I can't not come back and see all these smiling faces, especially the marksmanship team.?

?Somebody's got to be here to distract you guys,? Capt. Horvath added.

With half the building filled with the cadets he had worked so closely with for a decade, he and those in attendance got to see firsthand the legacy he would be leaving behind.

When Capt. Horvath assumed command of the unit during the COVID-19 pandemic, he faced some of the most challenging years in the squadron's history. Under his leadership, the unit survived low attendance, online training, staff shortages, and even the threat of closure, eventually rebounding to the point where cadet interest exceeded available capacity.

That leadership was reflected in his deeply personal approach to command. Cadets consistently described him as both mentor and friend, someone who sits with them at meals, learns about their lives, and uses humour to keep spirits high. His personal approach has deeply impacted the lives of many cadets that he worked with.

Thankfully, however, he will not be gone for long. Squadron leadership made it clear that they are working to find a path to return him to the unit as a civilian instructor, so that he may continue working with them, even in retirement.

Even as he steps back from leadership, Capt. Horvath has been honoured by more than just the local cadets and legion branch. He received honours from the Canadian Armed Forces, Cadets and Junior Canadian Rangers, and even a letter from Prime Minister Mark Carney for his dedicated and thoughtful service.

The ceremony was full of laughs, good memories and the understanding that this wasn't a goodbye, just a break for the captain before he returns.

The good news didn't just end there.

Near the end of the ceremony, a special service was held. Capt. Horvath and Capt. Diane Powers were married, right there in the legion hall. The move was a shock to everyone; only the newly married couple and the involved Padre knew it was coming.

Chris Skalozub, Deputy Zone Commander with the Royal Canadian Legion, congratulated them on their marriage, noting that it was truly an exception, something you don't see every day.

?Back in the old time when I served, you had to go and get the Padre and the acceptance of the base commander to get married because you were essentially in uniform,? he said. ?That's exactly why he did this wedding today, it was his last day in uniform. He's a married man now. It's fantastic. It looks good on them.?

?They're the happy couple now, and that gives them more incentive to keep on coming back and keep on working.?

He continued by expressing his support for getting Captain Horvath back with the cadets.

?He doesn't have the rank anymore, but he's coming back as a civilian instructor next year, which is perfect, because he's still involved.?

Capt. Horvath may have entered the legion to retire and close a chapter of his life, but a surprise marriage to end the evening proved it was not a goodbye ? but a new beginning.