

Wollaston celebrates public works retirees



By Chris Houston

On Sept. 10, Wollaston council paid tribute to three staff, who retired after clocking up 91 years of services in the municipality's public works department. Superintendent Kirk McCaw wrapped up 19 years of leadership, and equipment operator Jack Ingram officially retired after 41 years. It would be 42 if his part time summer job was included. Equipment operator Kevin Mace spent three decades in the department. In an official ceremony at the township offices, Mayor Michael Fuerth recalled years of hard work from all men, and the public's appreciation for their dedication. The mayor credited Kirk McCaw for "going the extra mile" and for his ability to keep things within budget. He praised Ingram for his efforts to keep Wollaston's roads open, noting his 5am starts. The men were given with certificates congratulating them on their retirement and were given a pocket knife. Fuerth read a statement from McCaw's sister that celebrated his dedication to his work since his first job as bulldozer operator. Lois McCaw read "Kirk's Song", a poem celebrating her husband's "20 years a Road Supt., 53 a firefighter, deputy of chief." McCaw thanked his team for their support, stating "Jack and Kevin, they were behind me 100 per cent." He praised their dedication: "I checked and there was 35 or 36 days in which they plowed consecutively during the winter. Most of the time when I got up in the morning to go work at 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. in the morning, it was already done, Jack already did it." The emotions were clear in McCaw's voice, his praise for his team unquestionably sincere. Ingram spoke, noting the changes over the years and mentioning improved working conditions and the reduced patience of the community around snow clearing. "It's been nice working here, it's been great, a great opportunity close to home. Working with different councils over the years has always been a bit of a challenge," Ingram said, noting his supervisor had new bosses every four years. McCaw stated that "I don't think the rate payers realize the commitment, the time and the sacrifice, all the Christmases and new years that all the operators have missed over the years." He said that "probably 90 per cent of the Christmases" were spent on the road, "in freezing rain and snow storms." Deputy Mayor Paul Ordanis also praised the men, "Wollaston roads went from a legacy of the pioneer days to roads with safety standards and levels of service under the term of Kirk McCaw. Kirk could not have done it alone and the long-standing working relationship in the roads department is a testament to his leadership. Jack Ingram and Kevin Mace provided the strength and incredible work ethic that made it possible. It's a tremendous responsibility to ensure people's safety day after day, these three have not only lived up to that responsibility, but exceeded it." Speaking to Bancroft This Week after the ceremony, Ingram recalled working part time for two summers before his official start date of 1983. "My father was a road supervisor when they hired me. At one time, these jobs didn't pay well," Ingram said, "I kept putting my name in. When you're on unemployment, working seasonally, you gotta make it look like you're looking for work. I threw it in here thinking they would never hire me," Ingram said, laughing. "Then Dad came to me, and he said 'well, we'll give you a chance, just part-time, the other guy quit.' He didn't really want to hire me, because he knew there was going to be flack from the other people, because you're hiring your son." "He almost fired me twice, he gave me two warnings," Ingram recalled his younger

years with a smile. "If you don't slow down, I've had complaints about you, I'll give you one more warning and then I'll send you home," Ingram smirked as he quoted his father. Ingram's family are deeply connected to Wollaston, his great grandfather was the township's first tax collector. Ingram stated that the township had no benefits for staff back when he started. The sudden death of council employee Ivan Boomhour prompted change. "After Ivan died, the council then said "maybe we should get some benefit for these guys"? Ingram recalled, stating that Boomhour died of a flesh eating disease shortly after Christmas in 1993. Ingram described Boomhour as a "big guy, a strong guy," and didn't attribute his death to his work. A gravestone in St. Andrew's Cemetery notes Ivan Paul Boomhour passed on Jan. 5, 1994, aged 44. When asked about his plans, Ingram stated, "I'm not making any plans, I'm just going day by day," before adding that he might squeeze some fishing in before winter.