



AMY DEMPSEY/TORONTO STAR

Platoon Sgt. Rob Cullen, left, told the story of retired firefighter Robert Wilson in a letter printed in the *Star*. He is seen with Morty Henkle of the Mikey Network and Const. Sean Boyes at a ceremony honouring Wilson.

Man's life-saving legacy lives on

Defibrillator donated in memory of firefighter Robert 'Red' Wilson

AMY DEMPSEY
STAFF REPORTER

He was a baseball champ, a pigeon enthusiast and a darn good firefighter.

Now, Robert Wilson will forever be remembered at the Sutton Legion, where a lifesaving heart device has been installed in his memory.

The story of the 79-year-old retired North York firefighter, who was found dead in his small basement apartment last month, touched emergency workers across the country and inspired a local organization to donate a defibrillator in his name.

"Firefighter Wilson hasn't answered his last alarm," York Regional Police Platoon Sgt. Rob Cul-

len told friends and community members gathered at the legion for the Monday night dedication ceremony. "He'll do it here."

The story would never have come to light if not for Cullen, who responded to the call the night Wilson died of a heart attack. At the suggestion of Const. Sean Boyes, Cullen went to the local dollar store, bought a Canadian flag and draped it over Wilson's body before they wheeled him out of the house.

Moved and determined to honour the man who served his community as a firefighter for decades, Cullen wrote a letter and sent it to the radio station AM640.

Cullen's letter, later printed in the *Star*, made its way to members of the Mikey Network, an organization that places public-access defibrillators in high-risk locations so people who suffer sudden cardiac arrest might have a second chance at life.

"Emotions ran high," said Morty Henkle, executive director of the Mikey Network. "I figured we had to do something."

Members of Wilson's North York firefighting family attended the ceremony at the Royal Canadian Legion branch in Sutton.

"I hope that you never need to use (the defibrillator), but I know if you ever do, it will serve you well," said Charles Jennings, a former North York firefighter who worked with Wilson.

Wilson, known to friends as "Red," was laid to rest in October with the dollar-store flag tucked into his casket.

Wilson was a pigeon keeper, an avid collector and an aspiring New York Yankee who once played ball for the Toronto Maple Leafs AAA team.

Friends and colleagues remember him as an excellent firefighter and a bit of an eccentric.