



EVEN HEROES NEED HEROES.

True Patriot Love

Gala Fundraiser for Military Families

By Amoryn Engle

National Post, Saturday November 21, 2009

It was the eve of Remembrance Day, and as I entered the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, it was clear that this was a very special evening indeed. Men and women in full military dress were everywhere, as close to 1,700 guests arrived for the True Patriot Love Foundation's first gala dinner. The largest fundraiser for military families in Canadian history, the gala was the brainchild of Medcanchairman **Shaun Francis**, who graduated as a Canadian Army officer from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, **Michael Burns**, president of ClearSight, and **Alek Krstajic**, CEO of Public Mobile. The money raised will be donated to the Canadian Military Families Fund — a fund created in 2007 by **General Rick Hillier**, Canada's then Chief of Defence Staff, to provide quick assistance to military families faced with "unforeseen and often immediate needs that have resulted due to conditions of service." (Hard to believe that this was the first gala fundraiser to support our men and women in uniform!)

At the head table sat Prime Minister **Stephen Harper**, various captains of industry including **Galen Weston** and his wife, the Hon. **Hilary Weston**, and the heroic **Master Corporal Jody Mitic**, who after losing both legs in Afghanistan, is heading out on his third tour of duty, this time as a gunner.

Also in attendance that evening was **Michael Ignatieff**, who was among the first to support the new foundation.

I had the honour of sitting with **Tara Dawe**, a lovely lady in her twenties, who lost her husband, **Matt**, to a roadside bomb in

Afghanistan. She had to leave the gala a bit early to get back to her four-year-old son.

The evening began over cocktails as guests bid on one of close to 100 military helmets decorated by artists, rock stars and other famous Canadians. Each of the helmets went for hundreds or, in some cases, thousands of dollars.

Once the guests were seated, thunderous applause broke out as men in uniform rappelled down ropes suspended from the ceiling. Then former Ontario premier **Bill Davis** took to the podium and introduced the head table, roasting a few of the illustrious guests as he did so.

One of the highlights of the evening was a very moving speech delivered by current Chief of the Defence Staff **General Walter Natynczyk**. "Tonight we recognize the outstanding service to Canada by our men and women in uniform," the General said. "We appreciate the love, care and support of their families. And especially in this week of remembrance, we celebrate our veterans — those who trained us, who showed us the way, who showed us what right looks like. Those who went overseas and made the supreme sacrifice so that we could live in peace."

With the help of presenting sponsor Telus, more than \$2-million was raised for the True Patriot Love Foundation.

Weekend Post

amoryne@nationalpost.com



EVEN HEROES NEED HEROES.