

Stewart a familiar face at local legion

This Jimmy Stewart is not a movie star, but don't tell his Belleville Legion comrades that.

To them, Stewart shines every bit as bright as the late Hollywood celebrity with whom he shares a name.

And, in another coincidence, Stewart's wife Shirley, well...let Jimmy tell it.

"Our name was the same, Stewart," Jim said, smiling.

The Belleville couple are native Quebecers and married in Montreal in 1958 after meeting at a dance. Jim was in the Black Watch army regiment at the time.

Their children, Bruce, 46, and Gloria, 43, were born in Montreal, before the Stewarts moved here in 1963. Jim spent 21 years in the army service corps, but it is his affiliation with Belleville Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 99, that makes him a good Quinte neighbour.

Whatever the legion function, you can count on Jim. That extends to Karaoke Night at the legion last Saturday. There was a reverential side to the evening, at one point, to recognize the four Canadian soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

"I asked if we could have a minute's silence," Jim said, during a recent interview at the couple's home.

This year, at 78, he left the Colour Party, with whom he travelled for years to various venues in Canada and the United States. Bruce is in the Colour Party and he, Shirley and Gloria's daughter, Mackenzie Koomen, 7, also made the trips. Both Stewart children live here. Bruce works for The Intelligencer while Gloria is an education assistant at a local elementary school.

"I just retired from the Colour Party, that's all. My legs would-

n't let me do it. Even now I have two speeds, slow and stop," he said, laughing. He was presented with a sash and plaque in gratitude of his contributions.

"I still go down to the legion everyday. Anything goes on, I'm there. I've got a life membership,

too."

By provincial law, legions are smoke free as of May 31, which may bother members who smoke but has a bright side for Shirley who has been unable to attend legion functions because of her bypass operation.

"Then I'll be able to go," she said.

Jim, who smokes but takes it outside at home, had a brush with cancer, but not the kind caused by cigarettes.

"I just finished four weeks in the Kingston Cancer Clinic," he

said, adding that he had some skin cancer on the nose but it was successfully removed. "I don't have to (go) back."

During his stint here in the army, Jim tended bar part-time at the Marysville Hotel, which has since burned down.

In 1974, he joined what was to become the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board. As a custodian, he worked at several schools before becoming lead hand at Sir Mackenzie Bowell public school.

Jim said he got along great with the students at SMB.

"I had no problems at all," he said, adding that the students would line up to help him clean up. "They all fought who was going to work with me."

The proof, as they say, is in the pudding and while he retired from the school in 1993, he still has students who say hello.

"I meet a lot of them at the (Quinte) mall," he said and they greet him with, "Well, how are you, Mr. Stewart."

Jim is at the mall because he has delivered The Intelligencer to merchants there since 1995.

While a lot of Jim's life is entwined with the legion, there are other interests.

The family used to visit the indoor mini-putt golf course at the old Finkle yard off Sidney Street. Jim and Shirley continued the tradition until a couple of years ago.

Bowling was big too at the alley that used to be located in Bay View Mall.

As for television, the Price is Right and Jeopardy are king.

With the Stanley Cup playoffs on, Jim is glued to the tube. Being from the Montreal area, he is a Canadiens fan, but likes the Ottawa Senators, too.

He and Bruce have Belleville Bulls season tickets, and with the Bulls out of the playoffs, Jim is rooting for the Peterborough Petes.

Jim plays cribbage at the legion, but so far that perfect game of 29 has eluded him although he remains optimistic.

"Pending on it," he said, smiling.

However, he has had better luck with darts, with the four-member team taking the C title. The trophy will be presented at a legion banquet May 6.

You can bet Jimmy Stewart will be there.