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The plaque may be small but the message is powerful.

And Murray Brennen, a retired ambulance attendant, cherishes every word on it.

It reads:
Your Job is to help save lives
But sometimes people have to die
We honour your gallant efforts today
there's not much more patients can

say
Because of you, we're not so blue
You made our son's
final wish come true.
Michael gave the Gift of Life
and tissue to 32 people.

An Oakville family presented the plaque recently to Brennen and his former ambulance partner, for trying to save their son's life in a house call in June of 2000.

Even though the man died in hospital afterwards, his donated organs and tissues have helped 32 people enjoy a healthier life.

The 60-year-old Brennen acknowledged he was touched by the family's kind gift to him.

"It was a bit emotional," he recalled.

"It was very nice of them to do that. It's recognition that all ambulance attendants appreciate," Brennen said.

The plaque represents a major highlight of a 32-year career as ambulance attendant/paramedic, the majority of it while stationed in Burlington.

"It sums up what I have done in the job. You try and save someone's life, sometimes the outcome isn't positive. You're trying to help and someone appreciates it."

Now living in a log cabin in Tweed, Brennen said

the plaque proudly hangs on a wall in his living room.

"I glance at it every once in a while and it brings back memories of my job," he said.

Brennen said it's been a rewarding career.

"I have seen a lot, done a lot and helped save some lives," he said modestly.

Born and raised in Belleville, Brennen spent four years with the Canadian army — three of them in Germany. After returning to the city and working in different jobs, he joined City Ambulance in 1967. He was with the ambulance service on a part-time basis for a year and then full-time for three more years.

"I want to thank Len Steele (former City Ambulance owner) for giving me the opportunity of

having the career that I had as an ambulance attendant," said Brennen.

He moved to Burlington in 1972 and joined the Halton-Mississauga Ambulance Service.

Brennen handled all types of calls in his career there, including transferring patients from nursing homes to hospitals, responding to house calls and treating patients at traffic accidents.

"I liked the work. It was challenging because every call was different...I have seen everything from birth until death and all aspects in between.

"It opened up your eyes to life," he said.

Brennen acknowledged that serious car accidents and dealing with the death of a child are especially stressful for emergency personnel to handle.

"There are times when you wonder what the heck you are doing but then you realize you are doing an important job," he said.

After retiring in August of 2000, Brennen decided to return to the Quinte area and moved into a one-bedroom log cabin on Highway 7 at the Log Cabin Restaurant outside Tweed.

"It is a slower pace of life and it was time to unwind and relax for a while and enjoy my old age," he laughed.

He finds the log cabin quite therapeutic "because you are out of the big city and learning how to relax again."

Brennen spends his time fishing in the Skootama River behind the log cabin and playing golf with his brother.

"I'm just trying to enjoy my retirement and after working that many years in ambulance service, I think I deserve it."