

Terry Layton earns CAA's Service Driver of Excellence Award

By Eamonn Maher
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Having been a tow truck driver in Halton Hills for more than 40 years, Terry Layton has had his share of peculiar calls to respond to, but says he never tires of helping people in distress.

The longtime Fred's Towing employee recently received the Canadian Automobile Association's Service Driver of Excellence Award at a reception in Toronto after finishing as runner-up for the honour in 2013.

Apart from the usual calls, such as responding to keys locked in vehicles, drivers running out of gas or hauling motorists from ditches, Layton has witnessed some strange situations, like pulling cars out of swimming pools and storefronts, or winching a cow out of the mud. Regardless of the conundrum, the native of Annapolis Valley,

pany's dispatcher "since I was able to pick up the phone."

Unable to actually drive a tow truck until he could get insured at age 21, Layton learned the dos and don'ts of the job while accompanying Fred on assignments and they'd often have to extricate accident victims from their vehicles, which is now the duty of firefighters.

"I've had to handle death many times," he said. "You get to know the police officers on a first-name basis. Some of them who were cadets at the time are now sergeants or retired, and when they see me they ask, 'Are you still doing this Terry?' But I won't retire until I can't work any more."

Although not a licensed mechanic, Layton is in the process of restoring his dad's 1967 GMC pickup truck and while he and Debbie, who've been married 33 years, don't have children,

their volunteer work is extensive, with Terry serving as the Santa Claus Parade and Light Up the Hills float driver, making deliveries for Cancer Society events and Georgetown Fall Fair Demolition Derby extrication.

He'll also pick up vehicles free of charge that people want to donate to the automotive programs at Georgetown District High School or Christ the King Secondary School.

The Laytons have recently helped spearhead a petition from the CAA to include tow truck drivers amongst emergency service vehicles that would be protected by the "move over" law under the Highway Traffic Act. Enacted in 2003, the law states that motorists who approach an emergency vehicle parked at the side of the road are required to either slow down or if on a multiple-lane road, must vacate the lane adjacent the emergency vehicle if it can

be done safely.

"It's scary sometimes to be out changing a tire at the side of the road," said Debbie. "These are our husbands and fathers and they're people too on the roadways and highways. They should be protected like the other emergency services people are."

One memory that freezes Layton in his tracks is the mention of last December's ice storm, during which he and Debbie spent much of their Christmas responding to distress calls. The traffic chaos helped set a CAA record for south-central Ontario with more than 10,000 calls during a 24-hour span.

"I've never seen anything like it and I hope we never ever see something that bad again," he added.



Terry Layton with his award.

'Every day is different in this industry.'
—Layton

N.S., who moved with his family to Georgetown when he was four, is always up for a challenge and likes the unpredictable nature of his job.

"Every day is different in this industry," said Layton, who turns 60 on Jan. 18 and estimates that 85 per cent of the company's business consists of CAA clients.

"You meet so many different people and you don't know where the dispatcher is going to send you next. It's not like you're standing at a machine or something. You could be going across the street or on a run to Peterborough, which has happened more than once."

Layton got his start in the industry at age 15 with Fred's Towing, which was owned by his father-in-law Fred, who passed away in 2008. Terry's wife Debbie has been the towing com-

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