

Banner year for Optimist Club

By Bill Snowden

It was a fitting finish to John Crawford's term as president of the Optimist Club of Stratford when, on February 2, he was awarded the Governor Jim Nother Trophy for leadership at the Midwestern Ontario District second-quarter board of directors meeting and awards banquet. Crawford, who is Inside Stratford/Perth's circulation manager, was singled out for praise from among 108 club presidents in the district.

Stratford hosted the event,

which was held at the Festival Inn; and the Stratford Optimist Club, which celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2007, also won three banner patches at the banquet, a testament to the strength of the organization. "Because of the history of the club," this year's president Brad Rickert told Inside Stratford/Perth, "we're very well respected within the district. Stratford has one of the largest memberships, and there's no question it

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Optimist Club of Stratford past president John Crawford, winner of the 2007 Midwestern Ontario District's Governor Jim Nother Trophy in recognition of his outstanding leadership.

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(Continued from front) has been a successful year." Asked what was behind the outstanding health of the Stratford Optimists at a time when many service clubs are struggling, Rickert acknowledged that the "whole idea of volunteerism can be difficult to keep going." But, he said, the Optimists haven't been "aggressively recruiting, because we haven't needed to." The reason, he continued, has to do with "the type of club we are. We have a lot of fun doing what we do, and that's the bottom line: it's a very social club, as well as having a strong sense of purpose behind it."

Mike Gornyczki, the club's president-elect, agreed, adding that "while John was president, his own enthusiasm and vigour tended to rub off on other members, and certainly helped generate participation at our events."

The last year has seen a few

big achievements for the club in addition to its regular work. In early fall, the Optimists chartered a group of Junior Optimists at Stratford Central Public School, for which the club won recognition at the awards banquet. "There might be one or two JOOI [Junior Optimist Octagon International] clubs in London, one in Kitchener; it's definitely one of the first

in the area," Rickert said.

Rickert also noted that Crawford had been instrumental in "laying the foundation for a future club" in Exeter. "It's a big thing, for a club to form a new club in a community that doesn't have one." While the Exeter organization is not yet chartered, much of the early work has been done under Crawford's leadership.