

His Honour
The Honourable David C. Onley, O. Ont.
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

Mr. Savoia, Commissioner Hope, Dr Conter, Your Worship, Chiefs, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am delighted to join you this evening in recognizing the vital work done by members of the Occupational Stress Injury Social Support Program and in honouring three individuals ~ Dr Barbara Anschuetz, Mr Roy McEachern, and Ms Dina Bertolo ~ who have been chosen to receive this year's Tema Conter Awards.

The story of the late Tema Conter, and of the memorial trust that was set up in her name by Vince Savoia, is extraordinary and inspiring. That the loss of Ms Conter, a young woman who lived her life to the fullest, should be grieved by her family and friends is a tragedy to which we can all relate. That the circumstances of her death should change the life of Mr Savoia, a man whom she had never met, and inspire him to create this memorial that has affected

so many other lives in turn, speaks to the infinite resilience of the human spirit.

Any one of us, who has witnessed or survived a traumatic event, can understand the reaction of someone who has undergone a similar experience. But how can we possibly relate to a person who must undergo such experiences continuously, sometimes on a daily basis, as a function of his or her job? For firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and members of the Canadian military in-theatre, traumatic events ~ “such stuff as [nightmares] are made on,” to paraphrase Shakespeare ~ are part and parcel of everyday routine.

Most of these brave men and women continue to function well, often performing above and beyond what is expected of them, despite the psychological stresses. They build strong defenses against the memories, the sounds, the smells. They learn to take them in, to detoxify them, as it were, and to carry on. I

have had the privilege of presenting bravery awards to fire fighters and police officers and, without exception, they have shrugged off their heroism in the most horrifying circumstances as “just doing our job.”

But sometimes even the bravest of these men and women find that their defenses have been breached, and they have reached a point where they can absorb no more. And that is when the Occupational Stress Injury Social Support Program, or OSSIS, comes to the rescue of the rescuers.

It is our privilege this evening to honour the valuable work of OSSIS, and also to pay tribute to the police officers, paramedics, firefighters, and members of the Canadian military, to whom we owe so much.

In the name of The Queen, I congratulate this year's recipients of the Tema Center Awards. And I commend Vince Savoia and the Tema Center

Memorial Trust for reminding us that “Heroes are Human.”

Thank you.