

## **RCMP whistle-blowers honoured in private Drinks, steaks and sweet vindication for dessert**

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Five whistle-blowers who jeopardized their careers trying to force the RCMP to investigate allegations of internal corruption, nepotism and mismanagement were quietly awarded the force's highest honour in a closed ceremony this week.

Gathered with their families around a horseshoe-shaped table at an upscale Ottawa steakhouse Wednesday, the cadre assembled for what they thought was a simple recognition dinner and a rare private audience with RCMP Acting Commissioner Bev Busson.

But for dessert, Commissioner Busson dished out a surprise: she presented retired staff sergeant Ron Lewis, Chief Superintendent Fraser Macaulay, Staff Sgt. Mike Frizzell, Staff Sgt. Steve Walker and civil servant Denise Revine each with the force's most coveted award, the Commissioner's Commendation for outstanding service.

Last year, the medal, which can be bestowed upon members and civilians, was given to only 19 individuals across the 26,000-member force.

The most recent recipients, who have affectionately dubbed themselves the "G5," have become well known among Mountie ranks and political circles in recent months for their key roles in exposing years of wrongdoing and mismanagement related to the RCMP pension and insurance funds.

The details of their efforts, which were met at various stages with extreme resistance and, at times, punishment, have trickled out during testimony at a parliamentary committee probing the issues. In front of that committee, each member of the group testified to having endured life-altering amounts of strain and stress while trying to force a proper investigation.

Mr. Lewis, former staff relations representative who is now retired, said the award was "vindication." He said the Commissioner told the group "she was proud that it was members of the RCMP that were the ones who uncovered [the scandal] and stuck to the mission, vision and values of the RCMP."

The Commissioner would not comment yesterday on the awards. A spokesperson for the RCMP said only that a more public ceremony will be held later.

Ms. Revine, the human-resources employee who first uncovered improper spending and subsequently was told that her job had been eliminated, said the award came as a shock.

"Six months ago, I would have never believed in 100 years that we'd be here now," she said. "I wouldn't have thought it would reach a point where the organization would embrace this as much as they have."

Still, others said the award cannot erase the sting of poor treatment.

Staff Sgt. Frizzell, who was removed from the pension probe after he started asking questions about what a senior Mountie knew, said that if Commissioner Busson hadn't been the person issuing the medals, the award would have been difficult to accept.

"It was night and day between the way she conducted herself in all this and the way the previous commissioner did. I accepted this from her; I didn't really accept it from the RCMP."

Staff Sgt. Walker, an investigator who was also yanked off the probe, said he'll "never look at the organization in the same light." But he conceded that Wednesday's dinner was restorative.

"I do not need a certificate or a piece of metal to tell me I did the right thing," he said. "But I highly appreciate the fact Commissioner Busson recognized it took an awful lot out of the five people involved to do what they did," he said. "It will, in all probability, change the course of our organization."

Chief Supt. MacAulay, the highest-ranking Mountie in the group of whistle-blowers, said the medal is the "beginning to a healing process."

"It was all about the perseverance -- we didn't give up," he said. "And at the end of the day, the truth started to come out."