

**JULY 2012**

## **“Rich Little’s Homecoming”**

Rich Little was back in his home town in the Summer of 2012 for back-to-back visits to two Ottawa entertainment centres. The brilliant impressionist from Bytown honed his amazing skill for mimicry as a student cut-up at Lisgar Collegiate, imitating his teachers’ voices. As he remembers with tongue-in-cheek, “There was a concentrated campaign among faculty staff to graduate me early – with or without a diploma”. All was forgiven, however, when he returned to his alma mater for the school’s 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a fellow Lisgarite, the late Lorne Greene in 1986.

Ottawa’s ambassador of good humour was the star headliner for the Canada Retirement Information Centre’s annual barbecue and private party at the Ottawa



Hellenic Banquet Centre. As their spokesman he welcomed members and their guests. Two days later, Sat. Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> he was back on the stage of his theatrical roots, The Ottawa Little Theatre, performing his greatly acclaimed tribute to his boyhood hero and close friend, James Stewart. Written, directed and performed by Rich, “Jimmy Stewart and Friends” is an amazing tribute to the iconic

actor featuring a Little tour de force of the “voices” of 25 famous Hollywood stars.

One summer during his teen years Rich worked as a movie usher at Ottawa’s old Elgin Theatre. He often recorded the dialogue from the films on view and memorized favourite lines by his favourite stars. “My employment, however, was terminated abruptly”, he recalls, “when one evening I accidentally rewound my tape recorder and its high speed whining sound was heard throughout a packed theatre”. All that summer he perfected one of his most famous voices by asking his mother at every opportunity, in the familiar drawl of James Stewart, for “a piece of apple pie”.

Although the Little family had no theatrical background, Rich had a solid and thorough training as an actor during his formative years. He has always had high praise for the guidance and experience he gained at The Ottawa Little Theatre. “Everything I know about acting was developed from those early years”.

In 1984 Rich accompanied me to the Beverly Hills home of Jimmy and Gloria Stewart, where he had arranged for me to do an in-depth interview with the legendary star. I began our taped conversation by reminding Mr. Stewart that Rich had often said that the voices he does best are the voices of the people he admires the most—and there was no one Rich admired more than his boyhood movie idol.

“The feeling is mutual”, he replied, “I have great admiration for Rich; he is a



master of his craft. He does my voice and mannerisms so well that people now tell me that I remind them of Rich Little! You know, when he first came out here I was so amazed at his impression of me that I thought about adopting him, but my wife wouldn't go along with the idea, she said she couldn't live in the same house with two fellas kind of mumbling and talking real slow.”

Following our visit, which included Rich delighting our host with lines from his films, we were leaving his house when a tour bus stopped in front. We could hear the driver pointing out the Stewart home to his passengers. Suddenly one of the tourists on board spotted Rich and called out to him, “Rich! What are you doing at Jimmy Stewart's house?” Without missing a beat, Rich replied, as Stewart, “Oh, I was just in there getting my batteries recharged”.