

Long-time cadet leader receives Sovereign's Medal from GG



By Brock Weir

Throughout his distinguished career with the Royal Canadian Air Force, he's flown the Queen, Prince Philip, and numerous Governor Generals, but it was an 'awesome' experience for Aurora's Dave Gordon on Wednesday when he stepped through the doors of Rideau Hall for the very first time to receive an honour on the monarch's behalf.

Gordon was among those honoured last week by Governor General Julie Payette with the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers, an award, part of the Canadian Honours System, established by the Queen to recognize everyday heroes.

Gordon was recognized for his over 30 years of volunteer with Air Force and Army Cadets, and even more volunteer work with veterans' organizations and the Commissionaires Ceremonial Marching Unit.

'I consider what I do as being quite normal for any Canadian, serving others,' said Mr. Gordon on what it meant to him to be recognized for his volunteerism. 'That is part of the military ethic I was raised under.'

Gordon's involvement in the Canadian Armed Forces began in Mississauga in 1959 when he joined the local Army Cadet corps. From there, he attended Kingston's Royal Military College and subsequently served 36 years in the Royal Canadian Air Force. His duties have varied over the decades, but his dedication to the up and coming cadets has been steady. He has led cadets from as far north as the Yukon and Nunavut and all across the country.

'What has kept my interest in the program is helping other generations to be good citizens because the Cadet movement is about citizenship, it is not really about combat,' he explains. 'It is about working as a team, being stronger as a team and having fun.'

Over the years, Gordon says he has seen the Cadet movement 'and those coming up through the ranks' becoming more technically involved through their training programs. In the Air Cadets, it is about far more than aviation, extending into intelligence, computer studies, and physical fitness.

'Biathlon is a really big thing with all three elements of the cadets because some of these kids might go on to be Olympic athletes and you want to germinate that seed in order to let them experiment,' he says of teens in the Air, Army and Navy corps. 'The cadets are now more diverse than the Canadian primary reserve as well as the military.'

A veteran of the Canadian Forces Air Transport Command, Mr. Gordon has recently been using the skills he acquired during his service with Experiences Canada, a national youth program that facilitates educational exchanges, trips and forums for Canadian youth, a program which has benefited over 370,000 young Canadians.

'Over the last three years, I have been involved with Experiences Canada, moving kids between Toronto and Northern Yukon for exchanges with First Nations on steps on the journey towards reconciliation,' he explains. 'The program allows groups of 10 or more youth between the ages of 12 and 17 to do exchanges each way. The Toronto area would host people from villages of 300 people in Northern Yukon and our kids would go north. Examples that happened this year was a Peewee hockey team coming down

from Rankin Inlet to play the Mimico Peewees. Attawapiskat came down to play Oakville and Oakville went back. It is a very good program and it takes a bit of military discipline to fill out the paperwork but, other than that, it is a totally brilliant support by the Federal Government. ?

Gordon's service with the Air Transport Command also led to his brush with royalty, helping fly the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh across the country, and across the Atlantic, in 1984.

?I was the lead navigator on the 707 and we went straight over the northern part of Baffin Island [from Vancouver] and we didn't turn the plane until we were on approach to Heathrow,? he recalls. ?Of course, Prince Philip was up front in the cockpit most of the time because he is a pilot and was really at home in that eight hour flight.?

However at home Mr. Gordon was Prince Philip was at the cockpit, he hadn't yet crossed the threshold of the monarch's home in Canada, Rideau Hall, the Governor General's residence, until he stepped up to receive his honour last week.

?It was awesome because I was able to have my son, his wife and my grandson there,? he says. ?It was the first time I had been to Government House, even though I have flown royalty and Governors General as part of my crew job, so this was really awesome.?