

Remembrance Week begins with Armistice celebration at Legion



By Brock Weir

It was a walk through time at the Royal Canadian Legion on Saturday night as the local veterans association kicked off Remembrance Week with a dinner and dance to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

Over 150 people came out for the occasion, which was a perfect mix of celebration and solemn remembrance. Joining the ranks of Legionnaires and cadets for the occasion were Aurora's two Members of Parliament Leona Alleslev and Kyle Peterson, Members of Provincial Parliament Christine Elliott and Michael Parsa, Deputy Mayor John Abel and Councillor-Elect Rachel Gilliland.

"It is absolutely our responsibility to honour those who have sacrificed, but I think it is also a time where we must take stock of where we are," said Ms. Alleslev, herself a retired member of the Royal Canadian Air Force. "In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and we believed that we had then entered in a time of world peace and Canada and our NATO allies dramatically reduced our investment in defence as we felt we could cash in on the peace dividend. For the last 25 years, we haven't focused as much on defence and security, but rather dedicated, and rightly so, our energy and attention to other things. And that is okay until it is not. Now we find ourselves in a time of unprecedented global instability where we're witnessing fundamental shifts in our economic and financial frameworks, our trade relationships, our defence and security structure and maybe even our concept of nation states and current international agreements and laws. As we navigate this time and envision the future, values will matter and do matter."

"What does that have to do with Remembrance Day, or, more importantly, what does that have to do with us in this room? I think Lt. Col. John McCrae answered that question best in his poem *In Flanders Fields*, where he talks about our responsibility, where he commands us to 'take up our quarrel with the foe,' and 'to you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high.'"

"But wait, in 2018 there is no foe. Or is there? The foe is anyone or anything who would jeopardize our nation's principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. Anything that would threaten Canada's economic and political freedom, our self-determination, our security, our sovereignty. A nation's peace and security is fragile and we must not be complacent or take it for granted. We must accept the responsibility entrusted to us by those who have sacrificed their lives. We must hold that torch on high."

"To those who serve, those who have served, and those who may be called upon to serve in the future, we thank you. Service to country is an honourable profession, so on Remembrance Day and throughout the year, we honour those who have sacrificed for the peace and security we enjoy. But we must also be vigilant in the defence of our values for which our nation stands. Or, as John McCrae would say, 'if ye break faith with those who die, we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields.'"

In her remarks, Ms. Elliott paid tribute to the veterans, calling the men and women who served, "the very best of our country, our people, and our values."

"To serve your country in a time of war is to take great risks on your country's behalf," said Ms. Elliott. "We are grateful for the courage the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces have shown and continue to show to keep our country safe. I am incredibly proud and honoured to join you this evening to commemorate, honour and remember everyone who has served our country."

Added Mr. Peterson: "It is an honour and indeed a privilege to stand before you on behalf of the Federal government on the occasion of this Remembrance Day dinner. Each year at this time Canadians gather to share our recognition and respect to those who have demonstrated the selflessness and the patriotism to wear the uniform and serve the country. This year, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Armistice, which ended the Great War. Nearly 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders enlisted. Their incredible service was on display to the world on Canada's 100 days, a string of victories in the last three months which saw 30 Victoria Crosses awarded for bravery.

"Sir Robert Borden was correct when he said, just months after the First World War, 'the spirit of self-sacrifice, of patriotism and of devotion has inspired the Canadian people from ocean to ocean and will leave an enduring mark upon our national life.' Veterans need to know that they have earned our gratitude and our respect. They also need to know that a truly thankful nation continues to pay homage to them. We must never forget their sacrifice and we must forever honour the dedication of our proud men and women in uniform. Lest we forget."