

Duke of York pays tribute to Aurora's finest -- past and present



(Prince Andrew, Duke of York, inspects Cpl. Graeme Sherman, a native of Aurora, at the final event of a day of celebrations of the local regiment -- the Queen's York Rangers. Auroran photo by Brock Weir)

By Brock Weir

The Grand Old Duke of York may have had 10,000 men, but while Prince Andrew contends he might not be grand, and he might not be old, he was glad to have over 60,000 behind him when he visited Aurora last week.

The Duke of York was on hand in Aurora ? well, technically just over a kilometer south of the border at Oakview Terrace ? last Thursday to celebrate the Queen's York Rangers and unveil plaques which will take pride of place at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park next week.

?York seems to be a recurring theme here,? said the Duke of York, noting his title, York Region, the Queen's York Rangers, of which he is Colonel in Chief, and the United Kingdom's Yorkshire Regiment, in which he serves the same role.

Speaking to a crowd of over 125 people at the lunch, which raised money for the Queen's York Rangers Regimental Assistance Fund, he paid tribute to the Regiment's role as reservists in the Canadian military.

?The regulars, people don't see much of, but the reserves are seen as a regular part of community life,? he said. ?They come and go [and] it is very important for the military to remain connected with the local communities and the whole message of today is recognition for what people have done in the past, and what people have done in the recent past, in order to defend Canadians and, for that matter, freedom on a much wider scale.?



The Duke of York meets Aurora veterans John Wilkes and Dorothy Gummersall at Thursday's fundraising lunch. The Duke of York's visit to the Queen's York Rangers commemorated the Regiment receiving five new battle honours to add to their Guidon, the battle flag of the Regiment. Four were awarded for battles won in the War of 1812, but also in honour of their recent service in Afghanistan.

'Each and every person who has gone to Afghanistan recently had to make a choice,' the Prince continued, addressing soldiers in the room. 'You could easily not have gone and chosen not to stand up and say, 'I'll have a go.' [It's] the fact that people have stood up and wanted to be counted. I have to say that Canada has supported its troops, be they regular or reservists, in a way which has shamed many other countries, including the United Kingdom, because we did not recognize those who returned either injured, or killed in action.

'It is only because we have seen the way you have supported and respected the actions of your military that we have taken those steps, as well.'

In his remarks, he also highlighted the Regimental Assistance Fund, which provides financial resources for soldiers who have returned from the front, and their families.

Before Prince Andrew unveiled the Diamond Jubilee Park plaque, joined by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, Councillors John Abel, Chris Ballard, Wendy Gaertner, John Gallo, Sandra Humfries, Paul Pirri, and Michael Thompson, as well as MP Lois Brown and outgoing MPP Frank Klees, he was presented with a plaque bearing his name created by the Pine Tree Potters Guild which will be installed at the Lt. Gov. John Graves Simcoe Armoury, and received greetings from dignitaries.

'It is an honour for me to be here today on behalf of Aurora Town Council and residents to recognize the meritorious service of Aurora's Queen's York Rangers,' said Mayor Dawe. 'It is also my great privilege to welcome to the community [the Duke of York]. Today, we gather with pride and with thanks as His Royal Highness awards five new battle honours to be displayed on the QYR Guidon. It is the spirit of the history and sacrifices of our Regiment. They have provided and continue to provide exemplary service to our community and to our country. They serve as symbols of valour to all Canadians. The Town of Aurora is proud to call itself home to such a renowned and dedicated group of outstanding individuals.'



The Duke of York with outgoing MPP Frank Klees, MPP Lois Brown, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, and Councillors John Abel and John Gallo after unveiling Aurora's Diamond Jubilee Park signage.

Ms. Brown also brought greetings on behalf of Prime Minister Stephen Harper: 'On this special occasion I would like to offer the Rangers my personal congratulations for upholding the tradition of service and loyalty that exemplifies your unit. You have earned the respect and appreciation of all Canadians.'

Following the Duke of York's visit to Aurora, the day of commemorations continued southward as did Ms. Brown and Mayor Dawe to Toronto's Old Fort York, for the formal parade of the Guidon, accompanied by Lieutenant-Governor David Onley, and a formal review of the Troops.