

Remembrance is more than a moment of reflection



By Brock Weir

As Aurorans came together to mark Remembrance Day this week, the number of young people descending on the Cenotaph swelled as they came to remember in silence or raise their voices as a choir member.

But, as their numbers grew, the number of veterans on hand to remember with them continues its steady decline, raising the question of just how one should remember in this day and age.

Indeed, this was a question posed to residents many times over the course of Remembrance Week, including the annual Veterans Dinner hosted by the Royal Canadian Legion on Saturday night.

“What we really need to focus on is the act of remembrance and how it differs from simply remembering,” said Dave Franklin, President of the Aurora Legion. “Remembrance is when you attach emotion to the act of remembering. For many of us, it is grandfathers and fathers, uncles and great-uncles that we recall.”

Speaking to the crowd of veterans, Legionnaires and members of the public alike, Mr. Franklin spoke about this act of remembrance and how it has been passed down the generations. He remembered in particular stories of his own father flying into Egypt in the late 1950s in the height of the Suez crisis with the United Nations, only to follow in his father's footsteps as an officer in the RCMP flying into Namibia to serve with the U.N. 30 years later.

“When we pause on November 11, it is our responsibility to not simply use the mental process, but the emotional one as well,” he concluded.

This thought was echoed by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, who cited the words expressed by colleagues in the Legislature earlier in the week, highlighting the importance of trying to put ourselves in the shoes of soldiers as best as we can, all the while knowing it is “impossible to comprehend in the safety of our homes, the safety of our careers, and the safety this room exactly what that meant.”

“How are we to understand what it must have felt like to be shot at and bombed, to suffer grievous wounds or be maimed, but this is the visceral reality of what it is like to serve in defence of these noble virtues of democracy and freedom.

“I think our obligation this Remembrance Day is to try and feel that reality, that danger, that fear. Each of these individuals faced

horror, fear, danger and then all of these emotions must have also been felt by their parents, their siblings and their friends. Our obligation is to understand the magnitude of their risk and their sacrifice and to respect them for that.?

No one knows this better than Donna Beek, Aurora's Silver Cross Mother, who lost her son Corey during the Afghan Conflict. Ms. Beek once again laid a wreath at the Aurora Cenotaph on Sunday's services, as she does every year, on behalf of parents who lost their children in the battle zones. As she performs this solemn duty year after year, she too has noticed people remembering in very different ways.

?We now have newer veterans, newer lost members and it is now fresh in our minds,? she says. ?People are more aware of what that actually means, instead of just going through the motions of remembrance. The Afghan War finished just a couple of years ago and now we have a whole new batch of veterans who have returned and they bring back with them the same issue we're now seeing today. It is relevant to today's world and, therefore, people are more emotional to it because they are people now their own age, or they can be their sons.

?The best way to remember is a day to day thing, not just on November 11, Remembrance Day or during Remembrance Week. When you see someone in uniform, just go up to them and say, ?thank you so much for everything you have done.' It will take soldiers a little bit aback, but that is more than enough.?