

Scout leaders left ?elated? after significant flags are returned to local troops



By Brock Weir

Next month marks the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Canadian Flag. While many celebrations are planned to mark the occasion over this year, the Canadian Flag was recently at the centrepiece of a very personal celebration for one Aurora group.

It was a Christmas present months in the making, but when Scout leader Trevor Stephens was finally able to sling eleven dry cleaning bags over the crook of his arm just before the holidays, he was left ?elated.?

These dry cleaning bags didn't contain the typical button-down shirts or freshly pressed pants, but rather precious cargo that was left in a particularly perilous situation last spring ? nine flags belonging to a long line of Aurora Scout, Venture, Rover and Cub troops and two national flags that were left in the rubble that was once Aurora United Church.

?The symbol of a flag is very important to the group, and to any group for that matter,? says Mr. Stephens. ?If you take a flag into battle you protect it at all costs.?

As much as they would have liked to protect their flags that was just impossible when fire struck and gutted the Yonge Street church that landmark morning.

What they looked like ? and, most importantly, where they were located ? was particularly fresh in Mr. Stephens' mind as just two days before the fire the group had done an inventory of what the Scouts had in their basement domain, deciding to dust off and straighten up their banners on the way out. This was particularly useful when demolition crews were clearing out the remnants of the church building.

?On a lunch hour, a heavy equipment operator was on his break,? says Mr. Stephens of a return to the scene. ?I drew a picture of the walls, where the rooms were located and where the flags were in the room and he went there that very day after lunch and bingo ? they didn't have the foggiest idea things were still down there. We might have lost all the flags totally. I was sitting on the edge of my seat for the longest time to see what kind of condition they were in. I was more concerned about the flags than our tents, stoves and camping equipment because those kinds of things can be replaced.?

Although Mr. Stephens can't attest to the condition they were in immediately after they were recovered, they were in remarkable condition once the group received them back from Britannia Cleaners & Fire Restoration in Hamilton. Although a couple of the flags bear battle scars in the form of singe marks around the edges, the badges proudly sewn onto the fabric remain bright.

“For the longest time, I didn't even know if they were destroyed, repairable or even if they were anywhere near intact,” he adds. “I knew the wall had fallen exactly where the flags were down in the basement. These are more of a symbol for our group. Some of these flags had badges and everything else sewn on them, so it tells you a story of what has been going on with this group. I was elated to see these again. I was flabbergasted. They have some tears, but I didn't expect to see them again in this kind of condition.”

Workers were also able to recover three boxes of historical records related to the troop going back to the 1950s.

Mr. Stephens has been involved in Scouting for over 40 years. He joined the movement in Saskatchewan in 1968 where he served with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He also led troops in the Ottawa area and another near CFB Borden before settling in his hometown of Aurora once again.

Since the fire, the Aurora Scouts have called a number of places home, including Trinity Anglican Church, First Baptist Church, and schools. Mr. Stephens says they are hoping to find a base at the old Aurora Armoury on Larmont Street in the near future.