

Art contest gives youth the chance to think about ongoing importance of Remembrance



Opportunities to hear about the true costs of war are becoming fewer and far between as veterans of the Second World War and Korean War rapidly take their place in history.

But in the lead-up to Remembrance Day, the younger generations are being encouraged to get their creative juices flowing to propel the message forward.

Each year, in partnership with local schools, the Royal Canadian Legion hosts National Youth Remembrance Contests that foster the tradition of Remembrance through visual art, writing and video.

Each Legion branch hosts the local contests, with local judges, and winning entrants then progress to the Regional and District levels and, if they go the distance, to the Provincial and Federal levels.

"This is an opportunity to provide young people with the chance to ponder and think about what Remembrance really means for them; they can either write essays, poems, or create artwork," says Claude Arcand, a long-time member of the Royal Canadian Legion's Aurora branch and retired teacher who facilitates the program locally. "The theme boils down to Remembrance - what does Remembrance mean to you? Depending on how it is presented to the young people in their schools, I will see artwork coming back focusing primarily on the historical aspect of participation in World War 1 and World War 2. Others will have an association with the fact that we are now still serving here, there and everywhere in the world. We have had imagery in the past which shows peacekeepers and military personnel in Afghanistan, Bosnia and things of that nature, but the basic theme is Remembrance."

Last year's crop of Aurora talent produced stunning results with a number of local students advancing right to the nationals, including Georgia Chivers, an Aurora High School Student who took first place nationally in the Senior Black & White Posters category.

Her work features a soldier looking over the stark grave of one of the fallen in reverence with the word "Remember" emblazoned above him on the Canadian flag.

"My mom encouraged me to participate in the contest for the last year I was eligible and I participated every year when I was a kid," says Chivers. "I did well in the contest, usually winning in York Region, and then stopped creating art once I started high school to focus on work, but, on a whim, I decided to try for my last year and I am so glad I did."

Chivers says she was first inspired to try her hand at art by her mother, an artist and art teacher herself. In this final year in the contest, her artistic vision was to make the viewer feel the emotion.

"The recognition ceremony [held at the Legion this past summer] felt like such an honour to be there with so many respected veterans," she says. "I was nervous to go up there in front of everyone at first and shake people's hands, but after chatting with them briefly about my art and getting their point of view, I was so incredibly honoured to just be there and listen to their experiences."

Also recognized at this ceremony was another young artist who went the distance, Marcus Ly, an area student whose drawing of two figures praying over the grave of a soldier - a cross surrounded by poppies -- took home first place in the Primary category.

"I thought it would be nice and be of meaning, too," says Marcus, adding his art teacher encouraged him to enter. "I was really excited and I thought I was going to be famous because I won out of all Canada!"

Marcus' mom, Diana, says Marcus "really put his mind" into his art "and it shows in the artwork he created."

"Whether you have an interest in art or not, it's a great way to have a creative outlet," she says. "We were in awe with the art - the professionalism and recognition really brought to our attention there are a lot of great artists out there and it's wonderful they have an opportunity for kids to be inspired and take advantage of it."

Legionnaires are hoping that even more kids and youth will be able to take advantage of the program this year. Facilitators like Arcand and Bonnie Robertson, Chair of the Legion's Poppy Committee, have set a goal for themselves to get the contests' entry packages into even more hands at local schools in Aurora, King Township, and down into Oak Ridges.

They hope to have these packages to the schools by the end of this month and following up with them in October before the submission deadline of November 17 - the Friday after Remembrance Day.

By Brock Weir
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