

BROCK'S BANTER: Roadside Shrines

By Brock Weir

It seemed a bit chilly when I first stepped out of our office on Thursday afternoon, notebook and voice recorder in hand, to take in what I thought was going to be a simple photo op as the Royal Canadian Legion hoisted a new banner at the corner of Yonge and Wellington.

It sounded casual enough when it was explained to us just a couple of days earlier: Mayor Dawe would be on hand as Legion members raised a new banner paying tribute to the service of Victoria Cross recipient Col. Fred Tilson as part of their new streetside program honouring servicemen and servicewomen past and present. A few snaps, a couple of interviews, and that should have been that.

Well, that wasn't that at all.

What transpired was a casual affair, yes, but one that was quite warm and moving as well as some honourees, their families, and sponsors gathered to take in the occasion and, in some cases, see banners honouring their loved ones for the very first time.

After the initiative was approved at Council this past Summer, I was curious to see how it would all unfold. The template, largely replicated from a similar template out of Uxbridge, was vivid and eye-catching, the intent was clear, and there was obvious passion behind it. But, like so many things, its success was entirely contingent on the backing of the community to (a) nominate the serviceman or woman of their choice and (b) cough up the \$200 sponsorship fee to offset the cost of the banner itself.

Judging from the sheer variety of individuals now gracing lamp posts in Aurora's Downtown Core, it is clear the response from the community itself was very healthy and there is only room to grow.

With 17 banners now in place to combat the elements in these heady days of fall, all Aurorans should be encouraged to head down to Yonge Street, take a stroll underneath the banners and take note of the individuals gazing down at them.

There are some names you might be familiar with, but more than likely some you are not. Some individuals you might see as active members of the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion or others carrying out their 'day job' as personal trainers and fitness instructors at local gyms.

There is a story behind each face, no less interesting or worthy of further examination, and what better opportunity to find out more. Unfortunately, these banners will only be in place for a limited time - through Remembrance Day - and back again at the same time next year, so strike while the iron is hot.

It seems a shame, however, that these banners will be taken down, rolled up, and packed away for another year just as soon as Remembrance Day is over.

Nevertheless, I hope this project inspires others - be it the Aurora Museum & Archives, the Aurora Historical Society, Sport Aurora, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame or the Town of Aurora itself - to brainstorm ways to transform these and other banners around Town into opportunities to both learn and celebrate our own.

A banner bearing a corporate logo can only go so far. Forging down a creative route to how Aurora brands its thoroughfares will not only serve to plant seeds in the minds of pedestrians and drivers to learn more about the communities in which they live, but could, in turn, serve as a way to make specific segments of the Aurora Promenade, or individual communities for that matter, destinations for the public.

The reality is there is no shortage of people, places, innovations, and firsts that can be recognized.

In my opinion, the time to put such a program in place is now.

Over the weekend, I attended the first of many meetings that will ultimately lead to the Town's 2017 budget. Near the end of Saturday's session, Council's thoughts turned once again to whether or not to earmark just over \$90,000 for a series of events to mark Canada's 150th anniversary next year just in case the Federal Government does not follow through with the money.

As an individual who personally sees the value in making an investment in such a historic national occasion, I was slightly more encouraged by the tone of the conversation a few days ago than what transpired around the Council table earlier this month.

Yes, \$94,000 is a lot of money, but it is not a figure thrown around simply to plan a party. Whether or not you think a 'pow wow,' a Military Tattoo and a fireworks display to cap the year is the proper way to mark this national milestone is one thing, but part of this figure is to go towards a lasting legacy project.

Legacy projects put in place nearly 50 years ago the last time the nation took a kick at this particular can are still enjoyed today, including the Aurora Community Centre. Obviously nothing of that scale can come to fruition with the numbers being bandied about, but there is an opportunity here to create something future generations can be proud of.

To that end, \$94,000 doesn't seem like a particularly exorbitant figure to consider. But, while Council makes up its mind on whether it wants to let all planning hang in the balance until the Federal Government makes up its mind at the end of the first quarter of 2017, a banner project seems like a particularly cost-effective and pain-free way to get that ball rolling.