

BROCK'S BANTER: Unscrewing the silencer

By Brock Weir

?That sort of flopped, didn't it??

I had to agree.

But before I had to put it in print, I had to retrofit that quote in terms that would be suitable for a family newspaper.

I refer to an off-hand comment made to me by a friend about Canada 150 earlier this month.

We just happened to be scoping out our table at the Aurora Sport Hall of Fame induction ceremony, held November 9, at St. Andrew's College.

Like so many events taking place this year, it was working a Canada 150 theme with flags bearing the now-familiar symbol of the year of ?celebration? in the bull's-eye of every table's centrepiece.

And, with that comment, I nodded by head in agreement.

He was right.

What was, as late as last year, still excitedly viewed as a year to make great things happen just sort of petered out ? for one reason or another.

Those most eager to celebrate might have had grandiose plans on how to mark the occasion without the government backing to really do it up right. A lack of cohesion on just what the themes for the celebration should be could have led to lost traction. Then, of course, there was the dredging up of darker periods of our collective history which were, rightly, something of a downer.

As I considered these reasons a few days later, I flipped on CPAC and joined a speech from Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer already in progress. By Canadian standards, it was an unusually chest-thumping and flag waving speech, but it was an address by prime ministerial hopeful on the 150th anniversary not of Canada as a nation, but of the House of Commons which governs it.

It was a tribute to the lawmakers that came before any of the incumbents took their seats, but an address which was, at various points, right on the money and, at others, in my opinion, somewhat tone deaf.

He began his remarks with a tribute to former Prime Minister Stephen Harper whose Conservative government apologised to our Indigenous Peoples for the Residential School System.

?It was appropriate because so many of the decisions that caused so much grief had been deliberated and, in some cases, approved right here in this building,? he said. ?That we who have been trusted with the governance of Canada sometimes failed should not be surprising. This chamber might be made of wood and stone, but the men and women who give it its life are hewn from the crooked timber of humanity. These chairs have supported patriots and heroes ? but also a few rogues. So, we cannot claim to have always been perfect but we know?that perfection is not available to us this side of eternity.?

So far so good.

?It is fashionable today to look down on the past but that is a luxury we enjoy from heights built by those who preceded us in this chamber. If you look back on our rich history and study the leading figures in its telling and see only the blemishes then you're missing out on the beautiful story of a country constantly bettering itself.?

Okay, fair enough.

?To those that deny we have anything to be proud of as a country, I would pose a simple question: where else would you have rather lived for the past 150 years? It is a straightforward question for which there is only one honest answer: there is nowhere we would have rather lived, no other country we would rather call our home. For no country has acquitted herself better at home and abroad than Canada. It is indisputable that the world has been better off for the last 150 years because of Canada.

?It is time for a little gratitude ? make that a lot of gratitude; that we have prospered and flourished is no accident. It is a combination of good fortune and good stewardship.?

If we were living in the United States, this would be the point where the collective Twittersphere would have shellacked the internet with images of bald eagles with a tear rolling down the avian equivalent of a cheek. We, as Canadians, simply do not do that to our beavers, but we could have inserted a record scratch or two.

First of all, it is anything but a straightforward question, as our expatriates around the world can attest. Nor, in my view, are there any people out there trumpeting that we, as Canadians, have nothing to be proud of as a country.

Sure, in the lead up to July 1, many were openly questioning just what exactly we, as a nation, were supposed to be celebrating ? prompting others to question whether or not we should ? but no one was denying the many achievements this young nation has achieved by this, the time of its comparable adolescence on the world stage.

It is a mischaracterization of the entire commemoration, albeit a remark targeted squarely on the Prime Minister's back, but a mischaracterization of sentiments across the country.

But the damage had been done.

Celebrations, commemorations, whatever you wanted to call it, have been muted.

Somehow, however, in recent weeks, Canada 150 has started to get its groove back.

Sunday, for instance, people put on their boots and came out in the sloppy weather for the unveiling of the Aurora Cultural Centre's Milestone Mural project, a brilliant and vivid collaborative work that is the result of contributions made and offered by hundreds of Aurorans which will, for a long time to come, bear silent testimony to this year and our history.

Earlier last week, Newmarket-Aurora MP Kyle Peterson convened a large gathering at Aurora's Northridge Community Church to bestow a commemorative Canada 150 medal on a whopping 150 riding residents who tirelessly give their time back to the community, volunteering in every conceivable sector.

Eight days previously, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leona Alleslev did the same, honouring two dozen residents of Aurora's south riding with a commemorative medal of her own, honouring not only volunteerism, but remarkable personal, scientific and adventurous achievements that have become a hallmark of the community.

But this past Thursday was, in my view, the icing on the cake as scores of students from Aurora ? and a few from beyond ? filled the gymnasium of the Aurora Family Leisure Complex for the Town's first Youth Innovation Fair, hosted by the Town of Aurora with support from the local Rotary Club.

Innovation is one of the key pillars of the Canada 150 commemoration and if excitement over other events had been tepid elsewhere, you never would have known it in the gym as participants outlined their views from the future and how their budding ingenuity might make a difference.

For a commemoration that has marked where we have been, this was as clear an outline as any on where we're going ? and, judging by those participants, we will be in very capable hands.

If support can be gathered to make this an annual or biennial event, it will serve Aurora well as a lasting legacy of Canada 150.

Congratulations to everyone involved.