

BROCK'S BANTER: What the world needs now

By Brock Weir

All in all, this has been a pretty good week for Canada.

I'm not just talking about the people from coast to coast to coast, dressed in red and white, waving their flags, and sporting red maple leaves painted on their cheeks, but I am talking about the entire Canadian mentality.

Over the last few days, we have had the opportunity to mark the centenary of a devastating blow to the men from Eastern Canada ? primarily the then-colony of Newfoundland ? serving King and Country, which ultimately turned out to be a galvanizing force in the First World War.

Many of us watched with pride, so to speak, as the Prime Minister joined other leaders in the Toronto Pride Parade, a scene which garnered the best kind of shock and awe around the world.

And some simply basked in the ecstasy of President Barack Obama's visit to Ottawa in which he boldly declared: ?the world needs more Canada.?

Combined, these make for a potent formula for some long-lasting afterglow, but I think, down the road, the words of the outgoing U.S. President will be words cited for many years to come.

?Our Muslim friends and neighbours who run businesses and serve in our governments and in our armed forces, and are friends with our children, play on our sports teams ? we've got to stand up against the slander and the hate levelled against those who look or worship differently. That is our obligation. That is who we are. That's what makes America special. That's what makes Canada special.

?Here in Canada, a woman has already risen to the highest office in the land. In America, for the first time, a woman is the presumptive nominee of a major party and, perhaps, President. Our work won't be finished until all women in our country are truly equal: paid equally, treated equally, given the same opportunities as men, when our girls have the same opportunities as boys.?

As someone who was once horrified to walk into a New York City gift shop to see racks of pretty pink t-shirts for toddlers to tweens emblazoned with the slogan ?Future First Lady? alongside ?Future President? t-shirts in a butch blue, driving home the message that the ideal girl marries well, or marries a man whose career prospects seem to be on the upswing, I would have stood up to applaud had I been in the room.

But, alas, I was not in the room, so I listened attentively to his next key points, which brought home the need to be ?bold? in the defence of our values, including the rights of people to speak their minds and speak truth to power around the world.

?In the end, it is this respect for the dignity of all people, especially the most vulnerable among us, that perhaps more than anything else binds our two countries together,? he noted. ?Being Canadian, being American is not about what we look like or where our families came from. It is about our commitment to a common creed. And that's why, together, we must not waver in embracing our values, our best selves. And that includes our history as a nation of immigrants, and we must continue to welcome people from all around the world.?

Although I sometimes fondly look back on the days when I could spend Canada Day on my own time, there is a certain pleasure to be derived from being on the job. While I enjoy the Town's Canada Day Parade each year, my personal highlight is seeing the unbridled patriotic joy on kids' faces when they are taking in the celebrations for just the first or second time.

They might not know exactly what they're celebrating or why, but they are in on it. They know there is something in the air. At the moment, it might not be definable, but there it is. They love it and they're basking in it. It is also fun to overhear (well, eavesdrop) on what their parents, grandparents, or caregivers say about why they're there and what it means to them.

The conversations are usually varied, and despite this year's bizarre and wet weather, there seemed to be an increased level of pride and energy in the air amongst those who decided to stick out the deluge.

And that deluge was something to behold. The sudden downpours cleared the park several times throughout the day, no doubt putting the business expected by on-site food trucks into disarray, but at this point I have to thank Mayor Geoff Dawe for being a truly full service mayor, letting me huddle under his umbrella during the final round of the Aurora Teen Idol competition when my skyward prognostication failed me spectacularly.

Thankfully, the skies cleared in time for the traditional fireworks spectacular, which was lit off just behind Lambert Willson Park. Perhaps my outlook was a bit rosy, thankful to be in a fresh pair of dry clothes standing outside in rain-free, mosquito-free weather, but from my vantage point at Optimist Park, the firework display was bigger and better than ever.

So, the ground is fertile for a Town like Aurora to capitalize on this sentiment.

While a citizen-led committee has been working hard over the past few months collaborating on a program of potential events and partnerships to mark Canada's own 150th anniversary ? the country's sesquicentennial ? the potential blowout is less than a year away, and even less if there is any impetus on the committee to spread whatever the celebrations ultimately boil down to throughout the year.

Having sat in on a couple of the planning meetings, the possibilities so far are very exciting and likely to appeal to a wide array of Aurorans, I am becoming increasingly worried that everything so far seems to hinge on the Government of Canada pulling through with the money to make it happen.

The reality is, of course, that the Government wants communities like ours to take the lead on their own celebrations, and this is a mindset that the present Liberal government appears to share with the previous Conservative government, which began laying the groundwork for Canada 150, so the funding enabling them to do so is likely to come.

We have been told the earliest communities are likely to hear back on their grant applications is October, leaving municipalities in a holding pattern of how far they can go with planning their celebrations until word comes down from on high with just eight months or so to get everything ready to roll by end of June.

Canada 150 is an occasion to be celebrated proudly. Communities like Aurora would be smart to convene a meeting and earmark what they're prepared to shell out on the celebration themselves so they're not left scrambling at the last minute until they know for sure the resources that will be at their disposal.

Once the money is handed down from the Government, the money can be returned to where it came from or, better yet, go towards the creation of a legacy project or permanent reminder of the celebrations.

A spiffy new cornerstone for a new structure on Library Square springs to mind ? but maybe that's just me.

Anyway, bask in the post-Canada Day afterglow. Apparently we deserve it.