

Cenotaph Centennial secures gold for Aurora, King, Stouffville



The tri-municipality collaboration celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Cenotaph brought home the gold for Aurora, King, and Whitchurch-Stouffville at the Hermes Creative Awards.

The Hermes Creative Awards, a program of the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals, honours excellence in traditional and emerging media.

The Gold Award for the three municipalities, which came together to mark the 100th anniversary of the Aurora-based monument memorializing those from each community who made the ultimate sacrifice for King & Country during the First World War, was a testament to the "depth, quality, and impact" of the initiative.

"The Aurora-Whitchurch-King War Memorial (AWM) stands as a powerful symbol of remembrance and joint collaboration," said Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas. "This recognition is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together. I am incredibly proud of the thoughtful, creative and respectful way this memorial was commemorated, and grateful to our municipal partners, the Legions and community members who helped bring this important historical story to life."

Added King Township Mayor Steve Pellegrini: "Receiving this international recognition affirms what our communities can achieve when working together. The AWM monument first erected in 1925 was the result of collective dedication, as residents came together to honour those who lost their lives from King, Aurora and Whitchurch. 100 years later, that same collaborative spirit lives on in the 2025 exhibition, created through partnerships across our community to preserve, interpret, and share this history anew."

Kudos were also offered by Stouffville Mayor Iain Lovatt who said, "this initiative reflects what is possible when communities come together with a shared purpose. It honours not only those commemorated on the memorial, but also the collective effort to keep their legacy visible and meaningful in our communities today."

The Cenotaph's centennial celebration kicked off last fall with a mobile exhibition erected outside the monument, located on Yonge Street, just south of Edward Street, along with street banners in each community paying tribute to individuals immortalized on the monument.

A special service and rededication ceremony was held before the monument in October, followed by a reception at the Aurora Legion.

Since then, the mobile exhibition has taken the show on the road and is due to land at the King Heritage and Cultural Centre later

this year.

“For us, this project was very deeply meaningful given the topic and what it was that we were commemorating the anniversary of. Everybody that approached this project did so in such a reverential and respectful way, right down to the third-party companies that were producing the signage for the outdoor exhibit,” says Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives. “Everybody had such a reverence and respect for the topic, for the work, and I think the awards underscore that how much passion everybody brought for it and how important it was to everybody involved to see that these men and their memory were honored, as well as the people of these three communities who came together.”

This passion was also underscored by Meghan Houston of the King Heritage & Cultural Centre, who said it was also a chance to renew the ties between the three municipalities and underscore to the residents of King that this is their monument as well.

“King is very much a community of communities and being able to bring together the stories of the boys from Nobleton, the boys from Schomberg, and the boys from King City, not just under the story of a shared experience of people in King, but it's also a shared experience of people from York Region,” she said. “This project, I think, opened a lot of people's eyes to how closely connected King and Aurora were.”

“We got the chance to delve back into old newspapers and old letters to really hear about what the experiences of the everyday person was like in the aftermath of that. It wasn't just families dealing with loss; it was farms that lost farmhands who had been parts of the family for the last few years, it was neighbours and teachers, and everybody was affected by it. I think a project like this definitely shows how interconnected not just our communities are, but the families that live in those communities.”

From Johnson's perspective, the commemoration of the Cenotaph's centennial and its readdiction was also a “recommitment” to fostering the Peace Park in which it stands as a “shared place” for all three communities.

“I think we tend to think of our boundaries, especially in the municipal museum world where myself, Meghan, and our colleagues in Stouffville come from, they're pretty defined but the reality is people continue to engage with people all across the different communities and traverse the different spaces for different things,” she says. “It's always been like that. It was certainly like that around the time that the memorial was constructed in the early 1900s. I think it's important to remember that because there's strength in coming together like that.”

“Having something like this memorial constructed and the park dedicated for this purpose of coming together, whether we can speak about it comfortably or not, it still serves that role. People still attend the park and they have for over 100 years for the purpose of remembering, reflecting, and paying respects. I think if we have more people from the three different communities coming on a regular basis, I think it's a very powerful and important thing because people across the communities are connected, whether it's through school, home, work, shopping, and they have been for quite a long time.”

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