

Cenotaph Centennial will see Aurora, King and Stouffville come together in 2025

Aurora, King and Whitchurch-Stouffville will mark the 100th anniversary of its shared Cenotaph, located at the heart of Aurora's Peace Park, in 2025 with a series of observances in all three municipalities.

The Cenotaph was dedicated by the three municipalities on October 3, 1925 in memory of the men who paid the ultimate sacrifice for King and Country in the First World War.

A ceremony marking the centennial anniversary will take place at the monument 100 years to the day this fall, but that is just one way the three communities will mark the landmark's milestone.

“The municipal collaboration is huge. It happened a couple of years ago when we did the Korean Memorial, we did it 100 years ago, and we're doing it now, so that is a really important story,” says Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum and Archives, who is leading the commemorations. “It's the idea of where you come from ? where you live and where you choose to belong. A lot of the names on the memorial are spread across three communities, some people may have lived in King but attended school in Aurora ? and it's been 100 years since Aurorans, Whitchurch-Stouffville residents and King residents have continuously gone to this specific piece of land for the same purpose: to remember, to grieve, to pay respects.”

Ahead of the anniversary itself, site work will take place to improve the Cenotaph and Peace Park space. There will be new hardscaping to increase accessibility, a deep clean which Johnson says will be carried out using the same products used to keep the Lincoln Memorial in tip-top condition, and some masonry fixes that are part and parcel of maintaining a century-old monument.

Once this work is carried out, a temporary exhibition will be installed on site, featuring reproductions of photographs and items from the Museum collection, by the late summer, where it will stay in place into the fall for the commemorative ceremony itself.

A travelling exhibition will tour King and Stouffville into the fall, along with a launch of a digital version online.

The Town of Aurora will also put out a call for a new monument to join the park, which is complemented by the Altar of Sacrifice, unveiled to pay tribute to those who fell in the Second World War; the LAV, which serves as a memorial to the Afghanistan conflict; and most recently, the Korean War Memorial.

“We're looking to include a memorial to honour Indigenous veterans as well,” says Johnson. “There isn't anything right now that points to their contributions since settlement, so we will be putting a call out next year for proposals for that memorial and plan to include a memorial of that nature for the 100th anniversary of the park and the memorial. That gap, I think, is obvious and we're looking to fill that.”

As plans continue to fall in place, Johnson says the three municipalities are “really excited to reaffirm these links.”

In Whitchurch-Stouffville and King, these links will be reaffirmed through a street banner program in the neighbouring municipalities paying tribute to those who are memorialized in Peace Park, lying in Aurora, the community central to both.

“These stories will be in these communities and the communities will be reminded of that history which, as a historian, I am very excited about and we're happy to be collaborating together,” says Johnson.

By Brock Weir