

Dave Franklin remembered as a modern leader with a big heart



By Brock Weir

Dave Franklin walked a fine line between embracing the changes of the 21st century while respecting the time honoured traditions of the past.

Both spheres came together on Monday morning to commemorate the life of Dave Franklin, who served as president of the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion from 2014 until his unexpected death, just three days after his term came to an end.

Mr. Franklin died the morning of Wednesday, April 26, after a brief illness. He was 68. Earlier this week, his family, friends, Legionnaires, and members of the community at large gathered at the Legion for his funeral, which was conducted with full honours and attended by his wife, mother, children, and many dignitaries.

A member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for nearly 35 years until his retirement in 2003, Mr. Franklin served the country in various capacities, including serving with Canadian Peacekeeping Forces in Egypt and Namibia, the first UN Peacekeeping missions with RCMP involvement.

Mr. Franklin's father was a veteran of the Second World War and, after the conflict, he left the military, tried his hand at running a flower shop, but decided to re-enlist in the military for a further 27 years. It was at his father's side Mr. Franklin first saw the value of the Royal Canadian Legion firsthand.

After 45 years as a Legion member, over 20 of which were spent in Aurora, he took the helm as president in the summer of 2014, with an eye of revamping what the Legion means to the community.

He described the Legion as both a community hub and a 'Safety net' for veterans to go for a couple of drinks 'without being hassled,' but it was much more than that.

'The transition I see happening with the Legion right now is obviously we can't depend on membership being based on veterans,' Mr. Franklin told *The Auroran* at the time. 'One of the things that bothers me is according to government statistics, which are false, we have 40,000 new veterans coming out of Afghanistan. We didn't send 40,000 different people to Afghanistan. Some of them went three or four times.'

'When I first joined, if you weren't in here by 7 p.m. on a Friday night, you couldn't get back in because the place was rocking. You couldn't see the end of the hall either for the smoke that was hanging in the air. But now, 'quiet' is the only adjective I can think of. We're trying to think our way through a new business plan, a new direction, and trying and bring the Legion into the 21st Century. If we can brighten it up, and bring up its attraction to people, we might get some of those Afghan veterans who are, thus far, kind of shying away because they see it as something for the Second World War veterans. It is not intended to be.'

His mission, as he saw it, was to make the place 'rocking' again, and that mission was certainly accomplished with a wide roster of programming which brought renewed interest and membership in the organization.

Ken White, a close friend of Mr. Franklin who succeeded him as President last Sunday night, says the mandate was to move the Legion into the 21st century, moving forward while remembering all the work that went into making the Legion what it was in the

20th.

“We wanted to make sure that if we weren't a flagship, we were at least on the forefront of Legions in Ontario moving forward with the new soldiers and the new members,” says Mr. White, who says they are now thinking of Mr. Franklin's legacy. “He modernized the face of the Legion, making the legion more comfortable for members to join and take the stigma away from the public.”

Mr. Franklin and Mr. White had a close working relationship. Dave was like a brother, he said, in that you always knew where you stood with him, “shot from the hip and had an extremely big heart.”

“Five weeks ago, he was working out at the gym getting ready for golf,” says Mr. White. “Four weeks ago he got a staph infection that went into his blood. We were preparing our Youth Education Day and that is when we realised he was ill. We told him to go home and he ended up at the hospital. He came home just before he passed away.”

“He was very honest and a good friend, a great mentor and a great leader.”

He is survived by his wife Dale, mother Madeline, children Jennifer, Jeff and Trisha, and grandchildren Azlan, Reece, Teagan, Tanner, Abby and Zoe.