

Hundreds gather to Remember the fallen



By Brock Weir

Hundreds of veterans, dignitaries, and particularly local students and their teachers gathered at the Aurora Cenotaph on a damp and dreary Remembrance Day to pay tribute to the fallen on Monday.

Some of them had seen active service themselves, some have loved ones still serving in the Canadian Forces, and some were newcomers to Canada with no particular ties to a veteran other than sheer appreciation. But, this week, they all had a common purpose ? to remember.

?I came out here because my great-grandfather was in the war,? said Ashlin Henderson, a Grade 3 student at St. Joseph Catholic Elementary School. ?I came here today because I care about what they did.?

The ceremonies hit close to home for fellow St. Joseph student, Ella Graham, 11.

?We appreciate what they did for us, we respect them and we want them to know we care about what they did,? said Ella, noting her father is still in active service with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The north side of the Cenotaph was filled with students from St. Joseph's craning for the best view of the proceedings, which included wreaths placed by Silver Cross Mother Donna Beek, Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown, MPP Frank Klees, and Mayor Geoffrey Dawe.

The local school was also well represented at Sunday services, with student Erik Dubeau sounding The Last Post on his bugle.

For principal Christine Dehaas, being at the Cenotaph on Monday morning achieved more than they could ever hope to in the afternoon services they had planned at the school.

?We could never share this at our school,? said Ms. Dehaas. ?We could never bring to them what we just experienced here. It was incredibly powerful, and although we do our best in school to experience this, being a part of it is something I think will have a huge impact on this generation.?

Monday's service, and the luncheon that followed at the Royal Canadian Legion, were the final ceremonies in a busy Remembrance

Week to honour our soldiers.

On Saturday evening, people filled the hall at the Royal Canadian Legion for their annual Poppy Dinner. Led by Ms. Beek, Mayor Dawe, and Legion officials, it was a time to raise a glass and take a moment to appreciate those who had gone before.

Ms. Beek, who lost her son Corey Hayes in Afghanistan, helped unveil a new memorial plaque honouring the most recent war dead.

“In World Wars One and Two, when someone was killed in action, there were millions of them, unlike today being one of only 158,” said Ms. Beek. “It was almost a daily occurrence. Now, we become temporary VIPs. We’re constantly being called out for monument unveilings [and other] ceremonies and it continuously renews that grief.

“On the flipside of that, when you have these kinds of events, and the hundreds of thousands of people who show up for these things, you realise you’re not alone in this. Even though the burden is sometimes unbearable, I look around and I see so many people who truly care, who truly feel and because of this there is a lot of comfort in it.”

Speaking at the dinner, as well as the two subsequent ceremonies at the Cenotaph, Major Brian Bishop of the Salvation Army underscored the importance of sharing these observances as a collective.

“As you look across this room, you see hundreds of people who are here just to celebrate and remember and acknowledge that great price that you personalized as you shared here this evening,” he said. “Christ himself said to love one another and we heard from Donna the importance of sharing that love with one another. I believe it is at times like these that you need that expression of love, not just on Remembrance Day but throughout the year. Be assured of our love and care.”