

INSIDE AURORA: Standing for the Fallen

By Scott Johnston

We all associate poppies with Remembrance Day, but there are some people out there who would like us to start thinking bigger, or at least, thinking of bigger plants; in this case, trees.

The Highway of Heroes Tree Campaign is an initiative with the goal of planting 117,000 trees along the stretch of Highway 401 from Toronto to Trenton, now known as the 'Highway of Heroes'.

These trees will represent the 117,000 Canadians who have fallen in the various wars in which this country has been involved since Confederation. To date, about 17,000 trees have been planted.

In addition, two million trees will be added in communities adjacent to the highway to honour all those men and women who have served in the various branches of the Canadian military during times of war. I'm not sure if Aurora is considered close enough to the 401 to be included, but I'm guessing not.

But wherever the trees are located along that corridor, they will provide a number of benefits; they will honour the military, cool the environment, educate our children, and beautify both the highway, and local towns.

Two million plus may sound like a lot, but in my mind, no matter how many you plant, you can't have enough trees.

With perhaps the exception of our recently-welcomed immigrant families, it's probably fair to say that everyone in this country has had a family member or close friend who at some point has served in the military, and perhaps paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I know that linking only as far back as the First and Second World Wars, several of the new trees along the 401 and in neighbouring communities will have roots in my own family tree.

For more information on this initiative, visit: hohtribute.ca.

Although Aurora may not see any new trees as part of this project, it was commemorating the fallen in our community in the same way well before Highway 401 was even constructed.

In the middle of the last century, 77 deciduous trees were planted in what is now known as the Aurora War Memorial and Peace Park. Each commemorated one of the men from Aurora and the surrounding area who were killed in the First World War, and whose names are inscribed on the Cenotaph.

Although some trees have been removed over the years due to injury or disease, these have been replaced, and there are still 77 in the park, some of them quite large and majestic. This time of year, they are also displaying their full fall foliage.

A more recent vegetative addition to the Park has been 700 tulips courtesy of the Dutch-Canadian Friendship Tulip Gardens project, which recognizes Canada's part in liberating the Netherlands at the end of the Second World War. These tulips provide a blaze of colour along that stretch of Yonge Street every spring.

Together, these trees and flowers are a living memorial to all of the soldiers from the Aurora area who have served over the years. This beautiful and well-tended greenery provides an added incentive for Aurorans to visit the Peace Park throughout the entire year. After all, while I look forward to seeing many residents there for the Remembrance Day service two Sundays from now, the use of this Park and the act of remembrance should not be restricted only to November 11th.

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