

Ken White keeps Legion members on the straight and narrow

By Brock Weir

When Ken White is leading you in parade, you had better be well prepared!

Mr. White, the Parade Commander for the Aurora-based Ontario Command for the Royal Canadian Legion takes his job very seriously. If you have turned out to Remembrance Day ceremonies at the Aurora Cenotaph or any other event that might have a colour party, chances are the face is familiar ? but what exactly is his job?

He's there to keep traditions and order alive and ensure procedures and protocols are met. If he runs a tight ship, it is apparently appreciated as he was recently awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for his efforts.

In all seriousness, Mr. White's involvement with the Royal Canadian Legion goes far beyond making sure people are marching correctly and rules are adhered to, however important that might be. As an important ?face? to the Legion, he has been integral in steering the ship of the Ontario Command through some pretty heady waters, particularly with the changing demographics coming through those doors.

?It is about seeing the smile on faces when they see people doing what they remember, or what they perceive to be the correct respect,? says Mr. White. ?When we run our drill seminars to civilians at this stage, there is some ex-military which helps, but we understand what we're dealing with but we try to truly appreciate the proper decorum, the deportment and the dress.

?They need to remember when they're wearing a uniform?we have an oath, we have taken allegiance to the Queen and the Sovereign and loyalty to our country and to be true to each other. For me, [the reward] is seeing the satisfaction that is the smile on their faces to say, yes, we are doing it properly.?

With the last of the First World War veterans gone, the Second World War and Korean War veterans continue to make way for newer crops of veterans from recent Canadian missions in places like Bosnia and Afghanistan, the smiles Mr. White sees are also becoming increasingly younger with each passing year. With the shrinking number of veterans, he is also increasingly seeing civilians coming into the Legion ranks.

?Our approach has probably been the same for much of the last 10 to 15 years but we are looking at some new ideas vis-à-vis bringing some of the new veterans into the fold to help out with the drill because it gives you a fresh look and gives the guys a new concept. There are questions they can ask, like what it was like over there, and it infuses them with more distinguished care and concern for the veteran and it brings it back full circle.?

Mr. White's involvement with the Royal Canadian Legion has also come somewhat full circle. His father himself a veteran, first captured his son's imagination with his stories. As a young boy, the Legion became a second home and he often stayed around to help clean up and do the odd chore here and there before joining the Queen's York Rangers Cadet Corps at the age of 12. From there, he rose through the ranks, went out to Calgary and served in the Canadian Armed Forces for six years before returning to civilian life in Ontario.

Changing demographics vary from branch to branch with the trend the Legion is moving more from a club simply of ex-service men and women to a more social and service club. Wherever that impetus for evolution and meeting the needs both for members and the wider community comes from, the philosophy remains the same.

?To join the Legion is to keep tradition and history alive,? said Mr. White. ?The Legion won't survive unless it has the bodies in there that are enjoying the sports or whatever function it is they enjoy. It could just be a social night, birthday parties, or anniversaries, graduations, they can use it as their own private club but the thing is you have to get the people to keep the Legions alive.?