

Korean War memorial to be unveiled Saturday at Cenotaph

It has been more than 70 years in the making, but this Saturday a new memorial honouring the sacrifices made by residents of Aurora, King, and Whitchurch-Stouffville during the Korean War will be unveiled at Peace Park, home to Aurora's Cenotaph.

Designed by then-high school student Alex Theaker of Aurora and approved by the Town in 2021, the new memorial, which takes the shape of a cube, will join the Altar of Sacrifice, which memorializes community members who paid the ultimate price for King and Country during the Second World War, the Light Armoured Vehicle (LAV) which pays tribute to those who served in the Afghanistan conflict, as well as the Cenotaph itself, which was erected to honour the dead of the First World War.

'I am very excited - it's not often that something I or anyone makes is a permanent addition to the Town,' says Theaker. 'For me, to be able to look at, and members of the public to look at, not only a fixture I made, it's about remembering the fallen from the community. I think it's going to be a fantastic addition to the memorials that are at the Peace Park.'

The ceremony will get underway at 11 a.m. on March 25.

The memorial itself is a project between the Towns of Aurora, King, and Whitchurch-Stouffville, alongside Veterans Affairs Canada and the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion.

At the start of 2021, the Town of Aurora and the Legion ran a social media campaign seeking feedback on design options, with Theaker's simple but bold design winning the day.

The campaign itself was launched following a delegation to Council by local historian Bill Newman who underscored the importance of highlighting the sacrifices of local families during what's often described as 'Canada's forgotten war.'

Today, memorials to Canada's contributions to the Korean War can be found at monuments from coast to coast, but Aurora has been one of the exceptions.

Although no Aurorans are known to have lost their lives in the conflict, Mr. Newman said it is 'timely and fitting' to recognize what they did to fend off 'yet another threat to the freedom and right of self-determination of the world's peoples.'

'We are requesting' the involvement of the Town and its staff to design and locate a fitting memorial at the Peace Park to our Korean War veterans,' Mr. Newman told Council at the time. 'We understand the funding for the memorial may be obtainable through Veterans Affairs Canada's commemorative partnership program for a community war memorial funding. Your favourable consideration of this request would provide overdue recognition to those from our community and surrounding area who served in what is being termed as 'Canada's forgotten war.'

The conflict began on June 25, 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea and 22,066 Canadians answered the call. It is estimated that 2.7 million soldiers and 2.5 million civilians perished during the course of the war, with 516 Canadians killed in action and more than 1,200 wounded.

'When the original article was published in the paper, I had friends, family and even neighbours come up to me and say, 'Wow, this is such a great addition,' and they're really happy to see such a memorial to the Korean War and to have that reminder of the fallen,' says Theaker. 'I'll be with everyone when it is unveiled and I will see my handiwork and really appreciate the work of the Town and the community on this amazing memorial.'

'I hope that after the unveiling people ask questions, and do research because the whole point of the memorial is to get people to realize the sacrifice that was made because we don't learn a lot about the Korean War in school - the only people who are going to know about the Korean War are those who are interested in history. My hope is the sacrifices made by the community, as well as

just the war in general and Canada's involvement are remembered.?

Following Saturday's ceremony, a reception will be held at the Royal Canadian Legion (105 Industrial Parkway North) where refreshments will be served.

For more on the Korean War Memorial initiative, visit engageaurora.ca/koreanwarmemorial.

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter