

Menorah lighting continues tradition as a 'beacon of light and love'



Young members of the Cheder Chabad Choir -- Chaim Aryeh Jacobson, Dovi Wagner, Leivik Steinmetz -- led by Rabbi Yossi Hecht of Aurora, serenaded a packed audience at York Regional Police's headquarters on Don Hillock Drive on Wednesday night. They were on hand for the YRP's traditional Menorah Lighting Ceremony, which brought out representatives from various synagogues from York Region and the GTA, local dignitaries, and representatives from faith groups.

By Brock Weir

The tradition of lighting the menorah might be an ancient Jewish tradition, but it is an ancient tradition that remains relevant and timely in today's world.

That was the message brought to Aurora last week by Rabbi Mendel Kaplan, a chaplain with the York Regional Police (YRP), as he led dignitaries, including Police Chief Eric Jolliffe and Councillor Wendy Gaertner, in the annual Menorah Lighting Ceremony, hosted by the YRP at their Don Hillock Drive headquarters.

'This is a festival that recalls a victory nearly 22 centuries ago,' said Rabbi Kaplan. 'To be sure, the Jewish people living in the land of Israel 22 centuries ago were militarily weak, but they were spiritually strong. Their victory is not really about military prowess, it is about the spirit of force, a force of spirit that was captured in a snapshot when our ancestors came and lit a menorah.'

As the tradition goes, there was very little oil to keep the menorah lit for more than a day, but they lit the menorah with faith and it burned miraculously for eight days.



Among those participating in the kindling ceremony were YRP Chief Eric Jolliffe, Thornhill MPP Gila Martow, Aurora Councillor Wendy Gaertner, and Aubrey Zidenberg of Bnai Brith Canada.

'It may be an ancient story, but this is an extremely relevant and timely message for us in our time,' he said. 'Darkness isn't chased away with sticks or brooms. Darkness dissipates and is expelled when we bring light into our lives and when we share that light with

others. The message of Hanukkah is each and every one of us has to be prepared to serve as a beacon of light, serve as a lantern of love, and that that lantern of love and beacon of light doesn't belong on your dining room table. It is not something that has to be focused and ruminated on in the privacy of the synagogue, but rather it is done at a public place at the window of our homes, in the doors, and at York Regional Police Headquarters.?

Hundreds filled the atrium at the YRP Headquarters to hear Rabbi Kaplan's words, including children from the Cheder Chabad Choir, led by Aurora's Rabbi Yossi Hecht. Students from various nearby religious schools, individuals from local synagogues and representatives from other faith groups listened on.

It is this inclusivity Chief Jolliffe was keen to stress.

?It is just an honour for us to connect with the community as we firmly believe as a police service that to build trust and confidence in any community, you need to be a part of the community,? he said. ?This is just one of those reasons why we are here to celebrate Hanukkah together.?

Rabbi Kaplan also paid tribute to this sentiment, noting the ?leadership? police services are providing across the country. He was ?amazed?, he said, to hear the Chief speak about using light to bring peace to neighbourhoods rather than force.

?What a Hanukkah idea,? he said. ?What a menorah you and the deputies and the members of our Regional Police Force are.

?Throughout the world there were and will continue to be hundreds of events each day celebrating Hanukkah and internalizing the message that if we share the light we can make a difference. If we are not satisfied with our past accomplishments, and if 24 hours passes and we know we have to add another light, we shall prevail and light shall overcome. In the end, the forces of tyranny, persecution, of racism and wasted and wanton hatred shall be vanished and our earth will become a safer, more peaceful, and godly place in which to live.?