

Pipers, choirs and the Red Ensign set to mark Queen's historic reign



By Brock Weir

Over the sound of the White Heather Pipes and Drums, Canada's Red Ensign will be raised over Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park next Wednesday, September 9, to mark the record-setting reign of Queen Elizabeth II.

The Red Ensign, which served as Canada's flag when the Queen ascended to the throne in 1952, will be the first flag raised on the park's newly-installed flagpole, signalling the start of an afternoon of community celebrations planned to coincide with the milestone.

Queen Elizabeth II is set to overtake Queen Victoria's record as longest reigning monarch that afternoon, and to commemorate the occasion, the Town of Aurora will host a community celebration featuring not only the White Heather Pipes and Drums, but also the Royal Canadian Legion Colour Guard, the Evergreen Choir of the Aurora Seniors' Centre, a citizenship re-affirmation celebration, and remarks made by Newmarket-Aurora MP Lois Brown, MPP Chris Ballard and Mayor Geoff Dawe.

?The [York Region Branch of the] Monarchist League was a champion of the concept and Councillor Jeff Thom is the one who proposed this for Council an once the subject matter was brought up, that's when I started looking into it and I have to say I really think the Town putting this on is something to be really proud of,? says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora.

?With the red ensign being the very first flag going up the flagpole, the exact flag the Queen had [in 1952] is pretty significant. Among our volunteers at the Summer Concerts in the Park and Movies in the Park is an English family who live in Aurora with two teenage boys. When we promoted the event, the two boys welled up with tears because they couldn't believe we were doing this in Aurora. The first thing they did when they went home was ask their parents' permission to come because it is the second day of school ? and this was more important.?

Queen Victoria set the record as longest-reigning monarch in the summer of 1897. By the time of her death in 1901, she had reigned a whopping 63 years and 2016 days ? a record which is set to be busted by her great-granddaughter next week.

?It is an exceptional feat for Her Majesty the Queen to be on the throne for 63 years, to surpass the reign of her great-great grandmother, Victoria, who is a pretty important figure in the history of Canada as well,? says Councillor Thom, who will emcee Wednesday's festivities. ?It is a really interesting historical landmark I think we should be recognizing and it also gives Aurorans, and Canadians across the country the opportunity to celebrate our constitution and the civic institutions we have formulated as a

country over the last 150 years and even beyond that.

?I hope people come away with the sense this is Canada's Monarchy. It is distinct legally and, I would say, culturally from the United Kingdom. The Queen and the Monarchy is part of the fabric of all those levels of government and, without noticing, it Is a very important part of our lives as Canadians.?

The Celebration of the Queen's Reign gets underway Wednesday, September 9, at 2 p.m. at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park (John West Way at Civic Square Gate). Festivities continue with a Community Tea at the Aurora Seniors' Centre at 3 p.m., followed by a Happy Hour Meet and Greet at the Royal Canadian Legion (105 Industrial Parkway North) at 4 p.m. All are welcome to attend ? and local recipients of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal are encouraged to attend, wearing their medals.