

Queen hailed for 'devotion to service' as she surpasses Victoria's record reign



The Royal Canadian Legion Colour Guard raises the 1922-1957 Red Ensign at Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park's newly installed flagpole on Wednesday.

By Brock Weir

As she surpassed Queen Victoria's record as Canada's longest reigning monarch on Wednesday afternoon local time, Aurora residents hailed Queen Elizabeth II for her decades of public service.

Over 85 people from across Aurora and York Region descended on Queen's Diamond Jubilee Park last week to mark the historic milestone, marking the occasion with performances from the Royal Canadian Legion's White Heather Pipes and Drums, the Evergreen Choir of the Aurora Seniors' Centre, Aurora Teen Idol Louisa Barbosa, the Legion's Colour Guard, and the hoisting of the Red Ensign, which served as Canada's flag when the then-25-year-old Elizabeth II succeeded as monarch on February 6, 1952.

'We are very, very proud of our Queen in Canada, and being the longest-reigning monarch, we think she is marvellous,' said Judy Fleming, who came in from Thornhill just for the occasion. 'She has given her whole life to service to her country, to the Commonwealth, through her lovely presence, her hard work and dedication. She has always stepped up to the plate when it has been difficult, as well as the joyful moments. We just think we're part of history today.'

After the crowd had assembled 'including several Aurora residents named recipients of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012 ' the White Heather Pipes and Drums conveyed Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Mayor Geoff Dawe, and Councillors John Abel, Tom Mrakas and Michael Thompson across the street from Town Hall to take part in the ceremony.

They were joined by Town Crier John Webster, who hailed the Queen as a modern 'Mother of Confederation.'



'During more than 63 years as our monarch, the Queen has united Canada by her example of inclusiveness, dedication and selfless service, of which we are deeply proud, and which we pledge to try and mirror in our own lives,' said Mr. Webster.

This was a sentiment echoed by Mr. Ballard, who put the Queen in the context of history, including seeing a dozen Prime Ministers come and go during her reign.

'The Queen continues to be one of the most influential individuals in the world,' said Mr. Ballard. 'She is a member of our Canadian family who reflects our country's traditions and our way of life. It is her selflessness, devotion to service and many successes that are to be celebrated by all.

'As Canadians, we see success in many forms. The Queen herself shares her own views of success. She says, 'I know of no single formula of success, but over the years, I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, talents, their insights, their enthusiasm and their inspiration to work together.' Here is to working together, celebrating our achievements and finding success in all our forms.'

In his remarks, Mayor Dawe said the milestone was a 'momentous occasion', particularly in a community like Aurora that 'cherishes its traditions.'

'We recognize the defining role the monarchy continues to occupy in the heritage of our great nation,' he said. 'As Aurorans, we can take pride in [being] recipients of the prestigious Prince of Wales Award for protecting our built heritage; as home to the respective and storied Queen's York Rangers regiment; we celebrate our indelible ties to the monarchy. We remember with great pride the visit of HRH Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, as he personally awarded medals of meritorious service to various Rangers.

'Aurora and Canada represent the very best of British traditions: we honour the rule of law, we strive to better ourselves, we help those less fortunate and, in the face of adversity, we persevere. In her unsurpassed reign, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has personified these traits, acting as a steadfast and inspirational example of both fortitude and forthrightness. As we pause to acknowledge the milestone of longevity, let us also pause to recognize Her Majesty's strength of character, her selflessness and her lifetime service to her people.'

Following the dedication at the park, the festivities continued across the street at a celebratory tea hosted by the Aurora Seniors' Centre. There, Councillor Jeff Thom continued his emcee duties and memories of the Queen submitted for the occasion were shared with the crowd. It also afforded dignitaries, and Federal candidates, to mix and mingle with Centre members and the community at large.

'I think it is a remarkable opportunity for people in Newmarket-Aurora to celebrate what Queen Elizabeth has meant to us in the history of our country,' said Conservative candidate Lois Brown. 'I am very thankful for what the Queen has offered to each one of us and I wish her a healthy and happy life.'

Added Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill Conservative candidate Costas Menegakis: 'This was definitely a fitting tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who is a symbol not only in Canada but around the world for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, how we can all live together peacefully, harmoniously.'

Leona Alleslev, Liberal candidate for the same riding, said the event was 'spectacular': 'As a history and politics degree person who went to Royal Military College and has a Queen's commission, I swore an allegiance and oath to serve God, Queen and Country. It is really exciting to see this much energy and this much enthusiasm for the Queen's reign. It has been a privilege to be here.'

Added Kyle Peterson, her counterpart in Newmarket-Aurora. 'I think it was a fabulous event, well organized and I think it was a great turnout. It was nice to see and I think it is a monumental day for all Canadians and something we should cherish and celebrate.'