

Remembrance Day goes virtual this year in Aurora

This was shaping up to be an extra-poignant Remembrance Day in Aurora.

2020 not only marked the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War but also, closer to home, the 70th anniversary of the Altar of Sacrifice, a moving monument added to the Aurora Cenotaph to remember the local lives lost during the 1939-1945 conflict.

Poignancy will still be in the air at the Cenotaph this November 11, but the Aurora Peace Park will be much quieter as members of the public are encouraged to stay home and watch a live-stream of the scaled-back Remembrance Day service in accordance to health measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have been directed by Command not to have a parade," says Lori Hoyes, President of the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. "Our normal Sunday-before-Remembrance Day parade is not happening, but we're having a small service on Remembrance Day itself at 10.45 a.m. It will just be myself and a few other people, those who are invites-only to the Cenotaph. We have partnered with the Town of Aurora, who will be hosting a livestream on their Facebook page and YouTube channel and also on the Aurora Legion's Facebook page.

"The service will be streamed from the Cenotaph and it will be somewhat of a normal service: less flags, there won't be a bagpiper, there won't be any of the troops, no audience, no cadets, just a few wreaths being laid, but most of them will be pre-laid."

Ahead of this very unusual but necessary service, barriers will be put up where the Peace Park meets Yonge Street, an area that is usually overflowing with people, including classes from nearby schools, paying tribute to Canada's war dead.

The Aurora Legion concedes that people might show up on the day itself, but implore people to not attend and watch from home or their office.

Although the general public will not be able to attend this year's ceremony, there are other ways they can take part above and beyond clicking on the livestream.

Wreaths from individuals, businesses and community organizations will be pre-laid by the Legion ahead of the ceremony, but there is still a chance to purchase wreaths that can be laid on your behalf. A limited number are available from the Legion at a price point of \$120.

"Other than buying a wreath, if stores wanted to buy one and put them into their windows, that is an option as well," says Rick Preston of the Legion's Ontario Command, which is also based on Industrial Parkway North just behind the Aurora Branch. "When 11 o'clock comes around, have your two minutes of silence, and that is the big thing."

Adds Ms. Hoyes: "Also continue to donate to the Poppy Fund, whether it is through a store and putting money into a box, or we will always take cheques, if they wanted to send money directly to us, marked as a donation to the "Poppy Fund."

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter