

Tank and tulips to transform Cenotaph park

By Brock Weir

The Cenotaph has been the focal point of Aurora's Remembrance Day services for well over 80 years but, this week, ground will be broken on two fronts to transform this place of commemoration and contemplation for generations to come.

This Saturday, October 17, Aurorans are invited to come out to the Cenotaph to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Dutch-Canadian Friendship with the planting of a new tulip garden. The public planting ceremony gets underway at 10 a.m.

The Town of Aurora last week announced it was one of 140 recipients of bulbs through the Dutch-Canadian Friendship Tulip gardens project, an initiative of the Canadian Garden Council, to celebrate the unique relationship between Canada and the Netherlands, a relationship that was forged during the Second World War.

Not only was Canada instrumental in the liberation of The Netherlands at the end of the conflict, Canada provided a home for the exiled Dutch Princess (later Queen) Julianna and her daughters, including the future Queen Beatrix. During their time in Ottawa, Princess Juliana gave birth to her third daughter, Princess Margriet, in a room at Ottawa General Hospital that was declared Dutch soil to ensure she was born on native ground.

Since then, the Netherlands has gifted Canada with 100,000 tulip bulbs each year to foster this relationship.

When in full bloom, Aurora's Dutch-Canadian Friendship Garden will bring to life 700 red and white bulbs courtesy of Vesey's Bulbs of Prince Edward Island and secure the Town a place on the 2016 Canada's Garden Route.

"Veterans, students and the community are invited to attend the planting ceremony, where the story of the Dutch princess born in Ottawa during WWII and the history of enduring friendship between Canada and the Netherlands will be retold so that it lives on for generations," said the Town in a statement.

The Cenotaph and Peace Park is set to be transformed further by the addition of a decommissioned light armoured vehicle, which will serve as a vivid reminder of those who served in the recent Afghanistan conflict.

Council approved the placement of LAV III, along with a cement pad and commemorative plaque to house it, in principle at last week's General Committee meeting following a presentation by Kirk Corkery of the Queen's York Rangers.

The Department of National Defence announced up to 250 decommissioned light armoured vehicles (LAVs) would be available to communities across the country to be placed in prominent locations to recognize the service and sacrifices of Canadian Armed Forces personnel serving in Afghanistan.

"The criteria [the program is] looking for are ties with Afghanistan, the Armed Forces, sacrifice, ties with the military defence industry, and location of the monument," Corkery told Councillors last week. "70,000 soldiers went over to Afghanistan over 13 years and many of them do have connections to York Region. 158 of them did not come back. Of the Queen's York Rangers, the Regiment here in Town, approximately 40 per cent of the soldiers did serve over there. LAVs were used extensively in Afghanistan."

Once approved at Council this week, it could be as late as next spring when the decommissioned LAV "that is, a vehicle that has been refurbished and rendered non-functional "in any way, shape or form" by students at Fanshawe College as part of their welding program "arrives in Aurora and, pending the installation of a new concrete pad and commemorative plaque, will be ready for public view before next year's Remembrance Day ceremonies.

The Queen's York Rangers Regimental Council will foot the \$17,000 bill for the cost of the vehicle, while Council has tentatively

approved kicking in up to \$15,000 for the concrete pedestal and plaque, to be funded out of the Council Discretionary Reserve fund.

?I would like to thank yourself and [Regimental] Council for selecting Aurora for this site,? said Councillor Sandra Humfryes. ?The Cenotaph is just such a beautiful place of honour where we can go and remember all of the soldiers.?

Added Councillor Jeff Thom: ?I think this is a brilliant, excellent idea. Aurora does have a connection with the Queen's York Rangers and we certainly want to support them. We really appreciate you bringing this forward. God bless you guys.?

Although Councillor Harold Kim said he had some questions about the budget for this project, he said there was a time and a place for everything.

?In some occasions, costs shouldn't matter,? he said. ?In a case like this, it is so important to remember that you can't really put a cost to it. I am not going to ask those cost-related questions [I have] and I fully approve this.?