

## VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Ride instilled pride

By Chris Ballard, MPP

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This past Sunday, you may have noticed a contingent of horses and riders come through Aurora. They were accompanied by members of the Governor General's Horse Guard and York Region Police mounted unit. Wearing their blue shirts and white cowboy hats, the group stood out.

In fact, the party, headed by Paul Nichols, a Canadian Forces veteran and his wife, Terry, had left Alberta on April 13 and started a 211-day Communities for Veterans Ride across Canada to raise support for veterans who have returned to their communities after serving in conflict areas.

The group received a warm welcome at the Aurora Legion in an event that included Lieutenant-Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell and the Aurora Legion Colour Guard.

Paul and Terry have found that many veterans face mental health issues, primarily post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and too often the process of transitioning back to civilian life is difficult. Paul says too often communities have no idea that young veterans are living among them ? and that some could use help.

Learn more at the group's website: [www.communitiesforveterans.ca](http://www.communitiesforveterans.ca).

The reason I highlight this particular event is not just because I believe in the message, but also because of the work that members of the Aurora Legion undertook ? on short notice ? to make this stop on Paul and Terry's travels the largest they had enjoyed to date. Most of us only think of the Legion around Remembrance Day, when we wear poppies and watch veterans, most with white hair, participating in memorial services.

Aurora's Legion is different than most. I'm told it is one of Ontario's larger and more active branches.

The Legion is actively involved in not only the lives of veterans, but also the community. I could write a lengthy list of all the activities I'm invited to at the Legion.

What has impressed me most is the amount of work volunteers do, and their dedication.

Sunday's event was quickly pulled together on short notice by President Dave Franklin, Parade Commander Ken White and volunteer Lori Hoyes ? together with an enthusiastic group of supporters. It was as grand and well-attended as any event planned for months. It did Aurora proud ? and the Legion proud as well. Congratulations.

Many believe the Legion just focuses on veterans of the two World Wars, but the story is much different ? made evident by the Nichols' visit which focused on young veterans.

Paul spoke about the trouble some young veterans have in reintegrating into their communities because they are, too often, not recognized as ?real? veterans. That is, they didn't fight in either World War. Support for Paul was evident at Sunday's event, with many of the elderly veterans giving voice to his concern.

In Aurora, with our own Queen's York Rangers, we have had young men and women undertake peacekeeping roles in Eastern Europe and on the battlefields of Afghanistan. The physical and mental trauma of our modern soldiers is no less real than those of our older veterans. The need to support our younger veterans is no less important. To its credit, Aurora's Legion understands that and has worked at building relations with the Rangers and others who have served, or still serve in the military.

There are many vibrant service groups in Aurora. It's one of the things that makes our community great. I would encourage anyone looking to support the community to consider membership in the Legion.

To join, you don't have to be serving in the Canadian Forces. You don't even have to be affiliated with someone who has served in the Forces. You need to be a Canadian citizen or Commonwealth subject. Drop by the Aurora Legion and check it out.

Norm Weller

Aurora lost a community pillar recently with the death of Norm Weller. Much has been written about Mr. Weller. I didn't know him well, but I do recall him fondly. Others may know him as Aurora's Parks Director and former Town Councillor. I remember him as a York Region District Public School Board Trustee.

On my first day as junior reporter at the Aurora Banner, many (many!) years ago, fresh from school, editor Ron Wallace told me to go to Mr. Weller's house in search of a story on the school board budget. Despite my complete ignorance about school board budgets and feeling overwhelmed, Mr. Weller patiently walked me through the numbers and I got a good story.

Over the years as trustee, he told it like it he saw it ? often to the chagrin of fellow trustees. People I met in my journalism career,

like Mr. Weller, former mayor Dick Illingworth and former mayor John West, taught me a lot about public service and commitment to our community. I won't forget them, and many of the others who served with them.