

Aurora cadets aim to walk in soldiers' footsteps at Vimy Ridge



By Brock Weir

As local cadets stood vigil on the four corners of the Aurora Cenotaph this week, they did so under the name of Robert Stuart Hillary, an Aurora man born and bred who lost his life at the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Nearly a century after Hillary and his comrades were killed in action on the field in northern France, some of these cadets hope to follow his path, visiting the fields and Canada's memorial to mark the 100th anniversary of the decisive Canadian victory in 2017.

But, the 130-or-so members of the local cadets vying for 40 places on this important trip might need a helping hand ? and a twirl of the fork ? from the public to make their dream a reality.

This Sunday, November 15, starting at 5 p.m. the Queen's York Rangers Army Cadets will take over the Aurora Legion (105 Industrial Parkway North) for a fundraising spaghetti dinner. Tickets are now available from the Aurora Armoury or the Legion itself for the event which is intended to make a dent on the estimated \$150,000 trip

The 2799 Queen's York Rangers Army Cadets set their eyes on the 2017 goal two years ago to provide an "amazing life experience" for the young adults in the program, according to Lori Hoyes of the Cadet Corps. The first significant dent in their fundraising goal was their selection as a recipient of funds from the 2014 Wild Wild West Hoedown, hosted by Magna International. A spaghetti fundraiser this past March did well, and they are hoping this one follows suit.

"This will be a life-changing experience and any cadet who has talked to anybody that has had an opportunity to go overseas knows this is a life-changing experience," says Captain Sue Lusk of the Corps. "It is something you should really feel and that is why we want our young Canadians to have a chance to experience this, especially kids that have already put their time and effort into army cadets."

With their eyes on the prize, the cadets are working diligently to secure one of the 40 places on the excursion. As they performed their nighttime vigil on Saturday night in the lead-up to Sunday's Remembrance Parade, they did so on tired feet having completed their fitness testing.

Fitness is just one criterion on which the cadets will be judged to find the 40 "best" candidates, explains Captain Lusk. They will also be evaluated on their volunteerism, fundraising and community involvement.

"They have been competing constantly for just over a year to get a position to go," she says.

Helping the cadets to reach their goal is 18-year-old Regimental Sergeant Major Emily Woodhouse. Although Ms. Woodhouse will have aged out of the cadets by 2017, she is taking particular satisfaction in keeping the cadets in check knowing what is ahead for them. She is recording their volunteer services, making sure they keep themselves in line, and says she has been fascinated to watch cadets right their own ships when they sense they have gotten themselves in a bit of trouble.

It is really a great opportunity and a really great motivation for the cadets to participate and do their part in the program because they have this reward at the end, she says. The cadet program is all about giving experience to the youth of today so they can be better leaders tomorrow and that is exactly what this is giving them. It is very important to educate them and this experience could give them that, something they can pass onto the younger generations once they get into a leadership position such as my own.

Cadet Daniel Bernardi has set his goal on the trip.

This means a lot to me because it has always been a big part of my military life, he says. Travelling to different parts of the world where Canada has laid down what we are as a peacekeeping country and being in those parts of Vimy, Germany and Holland will bring this very close to my heart. This was one of our most victorious battles of Canada as a nation and it is important to know that where they are today is because of where their past is.