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Port Hawkesbury Veterans Memorial Park monument dedicated



PORT HAWKESBURY — It took six years to become a reality and three years of dedicated work to bring it all together so it was fitting that the rain held off until the very end of the dedication services for the Port Hawkesbury Veterans Memorial Park on Thursday.

Soggy weather from earlier in the day cancelled the planned parade of veteran Air Force, Army, RCMP, sea cadets, various associations, student groups and other students from schools around the area. But it did not dampen the enthusiasm of close to 200 veterans, dignitaries, students and residents who showed up for the service, which included the unveiling of several panels with the names of 2,000 veterans from around the four counties, the dedication of the memorial as well as a chance to meet the sculptor who created it.

Timothy B. Schmalz made a special trip to Port Hawkesbury from his home in Kitchener, Ont., for the monument dedication. Schmalz, known for his war memorial pieces, says he wanted to incorporate the most iconic symbol of Canada, the maple leaf, into the essence of the bronze piece.

“It’s really nice to have the piece here on the East Coast,” said Schmalz. “So many have served from here and this was so meaningful for me. I tried to put as much as I could into this piece. I created a collage of different soldiers from all the different wars, representing a collage of different emotions. I want these figures to come down from a distant past and basically challenge us to remember our military heritage in the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers and what Canadians actually gave to preserve our freedom around the world.”

The piece features a large Canadian maple leaf anchoring several Armed Forces figures wearing uniforms from different wars that flow down to life-size statues representing soldiers, sailors, Air Force personnel and merchant marines. A military nurse holding a helmet from the First World War kneels by a grave in memory of the Unknown Soldier.

“We’re pretty satisfied. That’s quite a monument, eh?” Roddie MacIsaac, chair of the Port Hawkesbury Veterans Memorial Park Society, said just before the service began. “The support that we got from everybody for this is just unbelievable. You would not believe it. Anybody who says we don’t support veterans here, well, they do — it’s been unbelievable.”

According to MacIsaac, the monument is still a work in progress. More panels with more names will be added at a later date. Trees and shrubs have been planted and eventually, 2,500 red and white tulips will bloom in the area. Memorial benches line the space so people can sit and reflect.

The service featured music from singer Patrick Lamey, a poetry reading from student MacKayla Baker and prayers. But the main message of the day was summed up by retired Col. Lawrence MacIsaac, who led the dedication ceremony. He also did the dedication ceremony for Juno Beach in 2009.

“I led prayers at the Kandahar Airfield, where the images of our fallen heroes are etched in granite, stood with their comrades as they mourned,” said MacIsaac.

“We are here today to ensure those memories are never forgotten.”