

Legion Non-Levée bringing encouragement for 2021

(about 860 words)

For the first time since it began, the Royal Canadian Legion had to cancel its annual Levée due to COVID-19 and the current provincial lockdown.

“The tradition of the President’s New Year’s Levée has been in existence since Branch 92 was formed in 1927,” said Bill Beswetherick, Legion historian.

Every year the Gananoque Legion makes a point of inviting the MP and MPP for Leeds – Grenville – Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes; the Mayors of Gananoque and Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands (TLTI); the Branch President, President of the Ladies Auxiliary, and the Legion Zone Commander. In addition, they recognize honourees for numerous awards, and present cheques for assorted reasons.

However, this year things are different. Without the ability to gather together safely in person, several of the intended dignitaries have instead prepared words of encouragement to start 2021 off properly.

“In 2020 the residents and businesses of Gananoque and the Thousand Islands faced the COVID-19 pandemic as a strong and determined community,” said Gananoque Mayor Ted Lojko. “We showed respect for our neighbours by wearing masks, social distancing and taking opportunities to support our local businesses. Our community developed creative ways to enjoy recreational activities and celebrate our holidays while still maintaining safe health protocols. Pot banging, Canada Day flags and signs, porch concerts, outdoor movie nights, reverse Halloween and a stationary Santa Claus parade all provided some brightness in our lives despite these challenging times.

“Even with the thousands of tourists that visited our area during the summer, Gananoque and the Thousand Islands had relatively few cases of COVID-19, thanks to the hard work of our residents and local businesses in taking precautions to keep us all safe. We must enter 2021 with equal determination because the effects of this pandemic are far from over. But we will continue to face these challenges together as a community and will be stronger because of it.”

“COVID-19 has changed our world - how we work, play and spend our time and money,” said TLTI Mayor Corinna Smith-Gatcke. “We have been forced to look inward and ponder things that are most important to us, and things we might choose to let go of. A new year is always a time of rebirth and recommitment to ourselves and things that are important to us...”

“I watched as neighbours made a conscious effort to help one another, check on each other. I saw more patience and understanding... People always have hope. We have been inconvenienced, tested and almost broken in ways we never saw coming. But, I believe it will make us and our children stronger for all the good that will come out of this... I’m sincerely proud of our senior management and the employees that make the township run. We are poised for great things.”

“I would like to wish everybody a very Happy and Prosperous New Year,” said Ray Foster, president of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 92 in Gananoque. “It is unfortunate that 2020 cannot be looked on happily in hindsight as COVID-19 took that pleasure away from us. If and when we get back to some resemblance of normality, we will have some kind of Levée and

welcome the joy back to Gananoque and TLTI. We do have some awards to present and hopefully we can have this happen in the spring.

“I would like to inform all members of Branch 92 that we are managing to keep our heads above water during this trying time. The executive is working very hard to keep us afloat, thanks to some very dedicated members. My wish for everyone for 2021 is that we will become a safe and healthy world once again.”

Messages have not yet been received from MP Barrett, MPP Clark, the Zone Commander, or the president of the Ladies Auxiliary, but 2020 was not a normal year, and this is not a standard Levée.

“Although we are apart at this time, we would still like to remember our fallen comrades and those who have passed on since we last gathered together for the 2020 New Year’s Levee,” said Beswetherick. “In this past year we have lost Geraldine Chase, Ken Stewart, and Bill Hale.”

Mrs. Chase was known as an historian who wrote/co-wrote several books including “Harvards Above” (www.harvardsabove.ca/) and “Gananoque Remembers”.

Ken Stewart was known for his work with the Loan Cupboard (which has become GOALS (Gananoque Orthopedic Aid Lending Service).

Bill Hale was a WWII veteran and long-time member of the Branch 92 Royal Canadian Legion.

John Robertson was unable to make his famous moose milk for this year’s event, but he is staying in practice for when the real Levée returns. People are advised that he will still be making sure that no one gets more than one serving for fear that they might head out and try to milk their own moose (a job which is reported best left to the experts).

“A new year gives us a clean slate,” said Mayor Smith-Gatcke. “We can open the door on January 1st and let the wind wash over us and begin anew. Please join me in holding on for a good year in 2021.”

