

Legion looking for members to carry on its legacy



From left, Barry's Bay Legion member Peter Mika donates to the Poppy Fund, championed by Bancroft Legion associate Jim Younge at Bancroft's Beer Store Oct. 3. Younge is a longstanding Legion associate and has been taking the time to give out poppies for more than five years. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Membership chair and executive member of the Bancroft Legion Jill Bowman says the Legion has been doing well membership wise because of transfer members to the area, but its members are aging.

The average age of members is 70, said Bowman. That means able-bodied members who can participate in marches, community events or the Legion's colour party for Remembrance Day memorial services are in short supply.

"We can't continue to survive without the support of the community," said Bowman, expressing gratitude to the businesses in town that do help the Legion. She and Legion Padre Rev. Lynn Watson met with *Bancroft This Week* to discuss the legacy of the organization, which is the only of its kind when it comes to supporting veterans.

Watson explained that besides their pensions, the Poppy Fund singularly supplements veterans. No other organization is authorized to sell poppies to raise money and it is only poppies that can be sold to raise money for the Poppy Fund.



Thirty-year Bancroft Legion member Sean Cook hands out poppies at Scotiabank in Bancroft. Legion Padre Rev. Lynn Watson said generations before hers treated memberships as marathons ? once people became members, they continued their memberships year after year ? like Cook. Today, members seem to be sprinters ? people will be a member for a year, or two, then miss a few years or disappear. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

"Thousands and thousands of dollars go out from this Legion alone," said Watson, both when it comes to poppies and in fundraising for the community. She noted that's why it's important to respect the poppy. No pins through it to keep it on and no wearing it after Remembrance Day, she said.

?It's the only way in Canada. If [veterans] need extra help, it comes from the Poppy Fund,? said Watson. ?So if you have to buy five or six [because you lose them, do so].?

?Every Canadian should be a member of a Legion,? she continued. She said if 20-, 30- and 40-year-olds didn't start stepping up, one membership at a time, the Legion wouldn't be around.

?People don't realize that you don't have to have served to be a member,? said Bowman.

The last two veterans of the Bancroft Legion are 96-year-old Sir William Cooper Senior ? who gives out poppies at Scotiabank every year ? and Ewart Wannamaker, who resides at Centennial Manor. The rest of the Legion's nearly 250 members are simply fulfilling their civic duty, as Watson describes it.

?Just about every small community has a Legion,? said Bowman. ?The Legion gives you a community coast to coast to coast.?

Bowman explained that the Legion isn't exclusive, it's a community where everyone is welcome. Members get together and socialize, but they also help each other in times of need and help people network.

?There's no elite,? she said.

?It doesn't matter who you are economically [or] physically. Everyone is equal in the Legion,? Watson added.

?I'm really honoured to be a part of this community,? she said, noting it's one of the best she's been a part of.

Early bird memberships cost \$45 and are sold from September through November. For seniors, the membership fee is \$40 and the fee is \$55 for those 19 and older.

The best place to get more information is on the Legion's Facebook page at The Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command or Bancroft Legion.

Bancroft's Remembrance Day service begins in the Legion hall at 10 a.m., before moving to the Bancroft cenotaph for 11 a.m. The memorial service is followed by a luncheon at 12 p.m. where years of service and student Remembrance Day work awards will be given out.

?We've got to find a way to raise the visibility of Remembrance Day in our hearts,? said Watson.