

Forty and 50-year milestones marked at Greely Legion

Smiths Falls Record News
By Emma Jackson

The Greely branch of the Royal Canadian Legion celebrated its 40th anniversary with an even bigger milestone: a 50-year pin for one of the branch's founding members.

Kenneth Beek, a life member of the Greely branch, was honoured for his half-century of service at a ceremony on Sunday, Oct. 26 along with other Greely members marking membership milestones.

Beek, a Merrickville resident, comes from a military family: his father served in both world wars, and three of his uncles served in World War II.

Beek spent 12 years in the Canadian army, including a 12-month tour as a UN peacekeeper between 1964 and 1965.

He was stationed in what is now known as the Gaza strip, between Israel and Palestine.

Throughout his 12-year service Beek lived on bases in London, ON and Petawawa, ON, and spent time at CFB Gagetown in New Brunswick.

He first joined the Montgomery branch of the Royal Canadian Legion downtown Ottawa in 1964.

Ten years later, he had moved to Edwards in Osgoode Township, and joined a group of about 30 people who were in the process of founding the branch that would soon become the Greely legion. They didn't have a building at the time; instead, they met at Bruno's restaurant on Hwy. 31.

"They were mostly all veterans of the air force, navy or army," Beek said.

Some had served in the Second World War and the Korean War, while others were simply servicemen in the armed forces, he added.

Over the next couple of years the legion grew to about 140 members, including a now-defunct ladies' auxiliary of about 40 women.

Forty years later, Beek is a life member and past president of the branch, with 50 years of legion work behind him.

"All of a sudden, you're 75 years old and you know time goes very quickly and it sort of surprises you that (it was) 50 years ago," Beek said.

"A lot of water has gone under the bridge since that time."

Over the years, the Greely legion has fundraised for local charities, projects and non-profit groups, including the Perley and Rideau Veterans' Health Centre, the Winchester District Memorial Hospital and the Osgoode Township Care Centre.

Beek was the legion's representative on the care centre's original board of directors in the 1980s, serving as the fundraising chairman.

"They raised something like \$90,000 over a period of years and there were corporate donations, too," Beek said.

"It was a lot of work raising all that money."

The certified engineering technologist is retired from active legion duty

now, noting that it's difficult to attend evening events when he lives outside of the city.

He said the biggest change since he joined the legion - other than the fact that non-service members can join - is how much exposure the legion and its work now gets.

"It's become more conspicuous," he said.

"I think the poppy campaign every year is a means of publicly keeping the veterans' memory in the public eye.

The legion is at the forefront in that, with Remembrance Day and the poppy campaign.

He encouraged Canadians to wear a poppy during Remembrance week.

"It's keeping the memory of the soldiers and the servicemen who have lost their lives in conflict," he said. "The money collected is used strictly for charitable purposes."

The legion handed out service pins on Oct. 26 to members with a range of service beginning at five years.