

## Dufferin's Digital History Project goes National

By Marni Walsh

Recently retired Centre Dufferin District High School teacher Neil Orford has announced that his developed in Dufferin 'Digital Historian Project' (DHP) will go nationwide in the New Year with the backing of Ottawa. The award-winning Project is a model for experiential learning that allows students to explore a wide variety of subjects through digital storytelling - empowering research and exploration.

In 2014, Neil Orford began the Digital History Project with Dufferin students in collaboration with the Dufferin County Museum and Archives. At the invitation of the Ministry of Canadian Heritage, on the heels of receiving the 2015 Government of Canada History Award, Neil Orford spent 18 months working with historian and digital expert Blake Heathcote to pitch the project on a national level.

'It was always my hope that I could take the DHP to a national audience and have students across Canada use it in their schools,' Neil Orford told the Free Press. 'Whether for Veteran research and commemoration, like we do with the Dufferin County Museum and Archives, or to honour other major Canadian historical moments.' A website, re-branded as Testaments.ca will now be delivering the DHP model free, through a national platform known as 'Defining Moments Canada,' to registered schools, museums and community groups.

2018 marks 100 years since the Spanish Flu struck Canada. According to Testaments.ca, the pandemic took the lives of nearly as many Canadians as killed in all four years of the Great War and eradicated 3% of the world's total population in just 18 months. Studying Canada's 'Flu-Story' will be the inaugural project for Defining Moments Canada (DMC.)

Through Testaments.ca, DMC offers the digital historian platform nationwide to commemorate and study how this global epidemic defined Canadian history. Communities and schools will be invited to engage residents and students in deep research into the individual lives of Canadians affected by the Spanish Flu.

Mr. Orford was in Ottawa last week talking to teachers about 'opening their doors' to the concept at the annual meeting of Ontario history teachers. He said, 'There is so much potential to bring teachers of many different subjects together to participate' 'combining science, communications, and arts with history. 'Imagine the robust discussions about history and what we can learn about being prepared for a future epidemic, he said.'

Neil Orford toured European encampment and battle sites of WWI soldiers earlier this fall 'sites he has taken in many times with his students - and as well as new ones. 'I needed to situate myself where Canadians were in WWI, where they trained, so I could research how the flu incubated in military camps' 'a major conduit for the spread of the Spanish Flu. Soldiers returning on ocean voyages hastened the global spread of the deadly virus.

'Everybody has a flu story,' says Neil Orford. 'We want them to participate and retrieve these stories which have had such an impact on their lives.' He believes new Canadians will be able to find a common thread to engage in Canadian history with their own flu stories.' It is a global story that connects us all.

As the Program Leader for Defining Moments Canada, Neil Orford says the important thing for him is 'it all started here in Dufferin County.' He says, 'The community and the Board of Education made it successful. We hope that dedication will be replicated nation wide.'

The next two years will be spent putting the project together across the country and by the end of 2019, Canada's Flu-Story will be available on-line and 'live long after as schools and individuals continue to contribute to it,' says Neil Orford. 'Then we move on to the next commemorative project and another 'defining moment.'

As a teacher, Neil Orford says, "Young people are the best to tell these stories" in a refreshing and new way. He says, "Kids and families of Dufferin were there at the groundbreaking of what we hope will be a whole new conversation about how to teach and learn history in the 21st century." To learn more on how you can share your Flu-Story and make history visit [Testaments.ca](#).