

Neil Orford's Defining Moments Canada to launch VE Day, Insulin discovery projects

Written By MARNI WALSH

Retired Centre Dufferin District High School teacher Neil Orford, who now leads the heritage education organization Defining Moments Canada, shared two exciting announcements with the Free Press this week.

First, Defining Moments Canada will partner with the Ministry of Canadian Heritage over the next two years to lead the national digital commemoration celebrating the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin.

The digital project is called 'Insulin2021.' Neil Orford says, the project will honour 'the four major milestones in the discovery of insulin - Canada's 'gift to the world' - commencing April 2020 and running through to December 2022.'

Mr. Orford's second announcement involves the 2020 national commemorative project to share the stories of Canadians' contributions to the Liberation of Holland and Victory in Europe (VE Day). The federal government made the announcement in a press release last month.

Neil Orford told the Free Press that Defining Moments Canada 'will be sharing nine incredible Canadian stories from the 'Road to Liberation' in 1944/45, where the contributions of Canadians to freeing the occupied Dutch and winning the Second World War are often neglected.'

He says, 'By commemorating VEDay75, Defining Moments Canada will be reawakening Canadians to the significant role our combined forces played in freeing Northwest Europe from Nazi oppression.'

'What makes VEDay75 so unique,' Neil Orford says, 'is that for this commemoration we are partnered with the Canadian Research and Mapping Association, known as Project44.ca, one of Canada's leading organizations developing 'story-mapping' technology.'

He says, 'Project44 has digitizing thousands of WW2 maps, war diaries, correspondence and documents in our national archives, to help Canadians better understand our achievements in 1944/45 in Europe.'

The federal government's press release noted that the online project allows Canadian educators to 'take historical studies to the next level. From the classroom to the fields of Europe 'learning will be virtual and experiential,' calling 'VEDay75' a revolution in how Canadians understand and share their history.' The national project will launch in April 2020 in time for the May 8th VEDay.

Defining Moments Canada was co-founded by the award winning Neil Orford and writer Blake Heathcote. The project's earlier commemorations included the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic in Canada, and the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

'The good news for Dufferin County is that Defining Moments Canada is a Dufferin County success story,' says Neil Orford. 'We are still based in Orangeville, despite having a national audience.'

Neil Orford says, 'Since 2017, our work at Defining Moments Canada has been largely focused on the sharing stories of Canadians that are often little heard, if they are told at all.' Mr. Orford says the interest in their micro histories has 'grown exponentially' and their projects were 'featured in over 100 schools nationwide, with dozens of museums and thousands of Canadians registered for our site.'

To learn more visit: definingmomentscanada.ca.