

Local resident plans marathon walk around Fiddle Park

McNeil trading skates for running shoes to support Royal Canadian Legions

Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

When Steve McNeil plans one of his charity fundraising events, it usually takes the form of a marathon skate.

However, McNeil will be trading his skates for a good pair of walking shoes as he will be trekking along the trails at Fiddle Park in Shelburne for an 11-hour walk on Nov. 11, raising money for the Royal Canadian Legion.

A mail carrier with Canada Post for over 20 years and a hockey referee for 41 years, McNeil said his careers have prepared him to be outdoors in any type of weather, so if the day isn't picture perfect, he will go ahead with the walk as scheduled.

For the past 12 years, McNeil has skated 35 marathon events across Canada, 19 hours and 26 minutes each time, to raise funds and awareness for families battling with Alzheimer's and Dementia. He started the marathons in memory of his mother, Eunice McNeil, who was born in 1926 and who battled Alzheimer's disease for 20 years.

After his wife Tina passed away following a 39-day battle with brain cancer, McNeil said he thought it was time to raise funds for more charities.

McNeil decided to raise funds for legions across the country, as many of them are having difficulty staying open.

"I'm a volunteer at the Shelburne Legion and we do fantastic things there, and we have for quite a while," McNeil explained. "Most of the volunteers there give everything they've got, whether it's wing night or the Sunday morning breakfasts. My wife and myself have been hosting the Friday night suppers. In doing that, I started thinking how lucky we are in Shelburne because in my estimation, one of the top legions in the country, when it comes to volunteering and having our numbers in the black rather than in the red. There have been so many legions across the country that are hurting and have closed due to financial reasons."

After injuring his shoulder, McNeil started walking at Fiddle Park to keep exercising.

During his walks, he came up with the idea of supporting legions through a walk. McNeil plans on hiking the outer perimeter of the park on the gravel road.

"At 12:01 a.m., I'll take my first step and I'll walk in the park," McNeil explained.

McNeil approached the Town of Shelburne to get the backing of council for the walk, as technically the park is closed after dark. Council backed him up and members say they think it's a great idea.

"I'll walk from midnight to about 10:30 in the morning, then I'll leave the park and walk along Main Street to the cenotaph and watch the ceremony at 11 o'clock," McNeil said.

He's asking people to donate \$11.11 to their local legion to support ones across the country.

McNeil is relying on social media to spread the word about the walk.

He has a theory about fundraising.

"It relies on three things," McNeil explained. "You have to get people's attention, you have to get them interested, and once you do

that there's a good chance you will get them involved.?

If anyone wants to come out and join McNeil during the walk, even to walk just a single lap, they are welcome.

You can learn more about Steve's efforts at his website at: www.1926skate.com.