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Canada Day remains a celebration of unity, history and national pride for veteran John Flannery

For Dufferin County resident and veteran John Flannery, Canada Day represents the most significant national celebration on the calendar.

More than a holiday, he views it as a reminder of how Canada became a nation and an opportunity for Canadians to recognize and celebrate their shared identity.

He believes the day serves as an important connection to the country's history and stresses the importance of ensuring younger generations understand the significance of Confederation and the values that helped build the nation.

?Canada Day is the biggest day for the country, bigger than May 24, which is Queen Victoria's birthday,? he said. ?I think, for the country, we have to make sure that young folk are taught in school why we celebrate Canada Day, and really understand the history behind it.?

Flannery sees Canada Day as an opportunity for Canadians to stand together and take pride in what the country has accomplished.

He believes celebrating Canada is important because the nation has grown through the efforts of generations of people from many backgrounds who helped shape it into the country it is today. Rather than taking that legacy for granted, he feels Canadians should actively recognize it and demonstrate their pride through community celebrations, displays of the national flag and participation in local events.

?We came from great parents, if you want to put it that way,? Flannery said. ?The British Empire ? we were a colony at one time, and then we've made our own way here. We've accepted immigrants from all over the world and built the country the way it is right now. We are very special that way, and it should be seen.?

What makes Canada special, in Flannery's view, is its diversity and ability to bring together people from different cultures, traditions, and backgrounds under a shared national identity. He points to Canada's history of welcoming newcomers from around the world and its ability to maintain unity despite regional differences.

?Canada Day is really the result of all of us working together from various backgrounds,? he said. ?Evolving from a colony in the British Empire to our own independence... The provinces we now have from sea to sea is just something unique in the world. We are a unique country, and we shouldn't take that for granted.?

Flannery's perspective was shaped by decades of military service that took him across Canada and around the world. He served four tours in Germany, participated in United Nations and NATO operations, spent time in Egypt's Sinai Desert and Cyprus, and completed multiple assignments in northern Canada.

Experiencing other countries firsthand reinforced his appreciation for Canada. While he encountered many interesting cultures and places throughout his career, he came away convinced that Canada offered an exceptional quality of life and remained, in his opinion, the best country in the world.

His military experiences also highlighted the importance of protecting Canadian values and maintaining a strong sense of national identity.

Flannery believes Canada Day celebrations have evolved considerably over the years. While national pride has always existed, he feels celebrations today are larger, more visible and more colourful than they were during his early years of service.

?I believe there are bigger days than we used to have in the military, although we did honor our national days, it wasn't to the same scale, per se, to what I see now,? he said. ?It's noticeable for someone like myself who saw it before, as opposed to now. National holidays, Canada Day, now are more flamboyant, the word would be.?

Closer to home, Flannery is happy with how Dufferin County recognizes Canada Day and other national commemorations. He points to the strong presence of the Shelburne Legion, the involvement of veterans and cadets, and ongoing efforts to keep Canadian history visible within the community.

?They're doing pretty good, as far as I'm concerned,? Flannery said. ?The branch is well known there, it's in a good location. I would suggest perhaps to make it better known, we could do something more in regard to our holidays, whether it's a Canada Day or Remembrance Day, in the big new plaza, but they're doing good work right now.?

While he sees opportunities for additional outreach and expanded celebrations in some of the town's newer public spaces, he believes Shelburne continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to honouring Canada's history and celebrating the country it has become.

Flannery is anticipating the upcoming Canada Day celebrations and remains a fierce patriot as he works to rally more Canadians into treating Canada Day as a powerful moment of unity.