

Ontario Vets Soak up Sun, Sand and Muskoka Vistas

---Mary Ann Goheen, Ontario Correspondent

MACTIER: For 31 veterans, ranging in age from 85-100 years, residents of Sunnybrook (Toronto) and Parkwood (London) veterans care facilities, the week of June 17th spent in Ontario's cottage country will be part of their conversations with friends and family for years. The CNIB camp facility on Lake Joseph has become the vacation haven for those fortunate enough to be able to participate. ***"We have a criteria to be able to attend the camp...we also try to bring those who are new to Sunnybrook or don't get out to a vacation style setting with their own family"*** said Sunnybrook recreation therapist Jackie Chesley. Chesley has been accompanying vets to the camp since 1997. Twenty-four staff accompanied the campers. ***"Safety of the resident is our first priority—with respect to the individual's specific care needs and medical stability"*** she noted.

The 'camp' experience is all about relaxation, enjoying nature, having fun and getting away from the long term care environment. According to the recreation therapist ***"They (the vets) have to be able to room with another individual, tolerate the over 2 hour bus ride, not be at risk for falls and to be able to get in and out of the low beds with minimal assistance as there are no bed rails."***

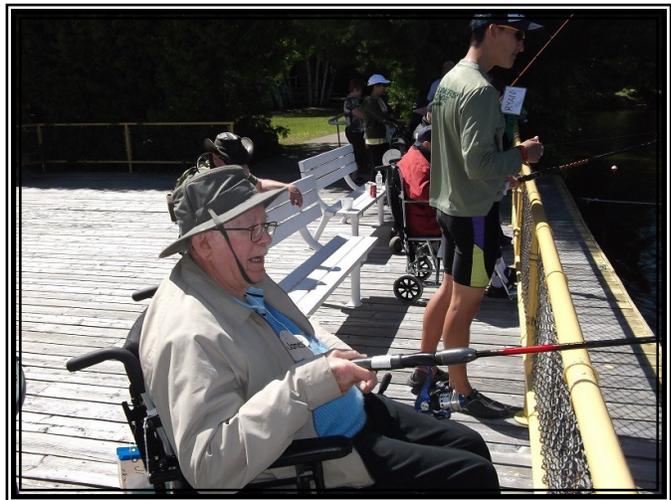


The Veterans are accommodated in cabins housing 10 two-bed rooms, self contained with heat, electricity and its own wheelchair accessible bathroom. There is accommodation for the medical staff within the same cabin as well. For Parkwood's Len Palmer this is his second time to the camp. He commented that ***"what is amazing is what the Legion does for Veterans"***.

Funding for the camp comes from 6 Ontario Districts and is channelled through the 2 Tri-District Hospital Committees (A,B,C, and D,E,F) for a total camp expense of \$45,558.65. Tri-District A,B,C, hospital Committee member and Vice-President of Ontario Command Sharon McKeown noted ***"Part***

of our role as a committee is to inspect and ensure that our Veterans are receiving quality care and that this camp venue is appropriate to meet the needs of our veterans."

Also present with McKeown that sunny day were Tri-district ABC chairman Eric Ross, members Chuck Johnston, Stew Taylor, Gary Gaeler, Barb MacIssac (LA), District B Commander Tom Astley and his wife Olga, Art Kuhl and wife Gail, Joan Fenech LA representative from Tri-District D,E,F and the Ontario Correspondent. Don Stewart, President of the Sunnybrook Residents Council, has been a resident at Sunnybrook for five years. Originally from B.C., the 89 year old is a navy veteran of both WWII and Korea, Don says ***"...everybody wants to go to camp...it is beautiful here and we are treated great"***



Camp provides the opportunity to fish from the dock, take a paddle boat ride with staff, a dip in the lake for the adventurous and hardy at heart, a pontoon ride around the lake to see Bobby Orr's cottage or just a time to kick back and enjoy the fresh air and postcard island dotted lakeside views. Sunsets followed by a campfire are all part of the experience.

The day of our visit, a themed "Flower Power" evening was planned complete with entertainment by 'Jukebox' out of Oakville. The husband-wife duo performed 60's music only to be rewarded with a dance floor filled with campers in tye-dyed shirts, head bands on long hair, and funky glasses. Both staff and visitors dressed in hippie attire and had the vets up dancing---what a party--! For Gord Hunter it was 'his 90th birthday bash'.

Sunnybrook resident's council President Don Stewart spoke to those present thanking the Legion for providing the funds so that they could "***get away to camp***" and enjoy themselves. However, Chairman of the Tri-District A,B,C, committee Eric Ross stated emphatically that "***...it is our pleasure (as an organization) to fund the camp venture ...and to see the smiles on all your faces is so rewarding and thanks enough for us....the Legion is very pleased to be able to give you something that can enhance your quality of life.***"



For Sunnybrook's Nelson Earle this was his first time to camp. The former tank driver with the Canadian Grenadier Guards 4th Armoury Division told me he was nursing a shoulder injury from a previous fall but he wasn't letting it slow him down. When asked if he was having a good time, the 90 year old remarked "***I can't dance anymore...I've had about 7 dances now and I'm worn out...I'm not going to dance anymore....this is a great evening.***"

As we prepared to leave, I glanced back to the party scene and there was Nelson rising from his chair making his way back to the dance floor with a young staff for what would be another turn at 'cutting the rug'.

Summertime in the city was never like this.

