

MEMORIAL

Students lead project to remember fallen in Afghanistan

Cenotaph and first of 158 trees — one for each Canadian soldier killed overseas — will be unveiled in Langley on Nov. 11

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VANCOUVER SUN

Canadians visiting the beach in front of the small Normandy town of Courseulles-sur-Mer where the Canadian Army came ashore on D-Day can be forgiven for coming away feeling they have trod on sacred ground.

Two years ago, Langley student Michael Pratt visited the monuments of Juno Beach and the concrete bunkers before which young Canadians died — an area saturated with reminders of their struggle and sacrifice — and was so moved that he wanted to commemorate those Canadian soldiers who had died in battle during his lifetime.

On Nov. 11, his efforts — and those of his sister Elizabeth — will be rewarded when a five-metre high steel cenotaph to Canadian men and women who fell in Afghanistan will be dedicated at the Derek Doubleday Arboretum on 56th Avenue in Langley.

"I kind of had the idea to do

something after visiting Juno Beach with my father in July 2010," said Michael, 15, a Grade 10 student at Brookwood Secondary School.

Visiting some of the Canadian military cemeteries in the hills above Juno Beach, he was impressed by how many contained groves of trees.

"I thought the trees symbolized the continuation of life so I brought the idea home with me," he said.

He discussed what he had seen with Elizabeth, 21, who is attending the University of British Columbia, and the pair decided to create a memorial for Canadians killed in Afghanistan using trees to represent the 158 fallen.

The pair were helped by Langley Township councillor Grant Ward, who directed them to the right people to get the project moving, Michael said.

The result of their efforts is The Walk to Remember Memorial and Cenotaph which, when finished, will contain 158 trees — one for each soldier killed in



Michael and Elizabeth Pratt work in the Derek Doubleday Arboretum, planting trees to honour the 158 Canadian soldiers who died in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan — in the 15-acre park.

Alan Neufeld, of Langley District parks department, said 71 trees have been planted at regular intervals along a walkway

that leads to the memorial to represent soldiers marching in formation.

The remaining trees will be found in three groves to represent those "broken battalions

which lost personnel," he said.

"Initially, the idea was for just a grove of trees but then we talked to Veterans Affairs Canada and they came through with a grant for the memorial," he said.

The \$50,000 memorial will be made of Corten steel, a self-weathering steel, whose surface has been finished to represent the bark of a tree. It will be wrapped in a stainless steel ribbon engraved with the names of all the soldiers killed in Afghanistan in the order they fell.

"As far as we know, it's the only one of its kind in Western Canada," said Neufeld.

Each tree cost \$300 and Michael and Elizabeth have found sponsors for 125 so far.

"We need 33 more so we can complete it," said Michael.

Persons wishing to sponsor a tree can visit the pair's Facebook page, Langley Youth for the Fallen, A Walk to Remember, for details.

Capt. Jim Tempest, the music director of the band of the 15th Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, said what the pair have done was stunning.

"It's remarkable that a high school kid and a university student took it upon themselves to get community support to do this to recognize the sacrifices made by members of the military," said Tempest.

The 45-member band will perform at the dedication ceremony that will take place in the park at 2 p.m. Nov. 11.

The band will also perform its annual With Glowing Hearts concert series in the week before Remembrance Day.

"Michael and Elizabeth have agreed to come and speak before the concerts on Nov. 4 and 9th," said Tempest.

Proceeds from the concerts will go to the B.C. Military Music Society.

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With Glowing Hearts concert series

Nov. 4, 2 p.m. | ACT Theatre, Maple Ridge

Nov. 7, 7:30 p.m. | Centennial Theatre, North Vancouver

Nov. 9, 7:30 p.m. | Gateway Theatre, Richmond