

Town Council expected to approve Bravery Park site on Alder



By Mike Pickford

Following a nearly decade-long search for a home in Orangeville it is expected that Town Council will finally sign off on a permanent location for Bravery Park next week.

A concept almost eight years in the making, the innovative project was launched back in 2010 by mother-daughter tandem Shannon and Valerie McGrady as they sought to provide local residents with a 'place of reflection' to honour the bravery, achievements and sacrifices of members of the Canadian military.

The park, which, pending council approval, will be built beside the Alder Recreation Centre, is set to become only the second such structure in all of Canada, following on from a site in Prince George, British Columbia.

While the notion of Bravery Park today represents a number of positive ideologies, it was one born out of tragedy. On May 25, 2007 Orangeville native Matthew McCully 'brother to Shannon and son to Valerie' was killed by a roadside bomb near a small village outside of Kandahar City, Afghanistan. In what was his second tour of the war-torn Middle Eastern nation, Cpl. McCully was a member of the Operation Mentoring and Liaison Team that trained Afghani soldiers before his untimely death.

Having worked alongside the municipality for several years in hopes of seeing their dream become a reality, the McGradys spoke of their excitement last week as they prepare to stand before council on Monday night (May 29).

'I guess it's a nervous, excited feeling at this point,' Shannon told the Citizen as a group of committee members gathered at the McDonald's on Riddell Road to accept a \$2,900 donation. 'This has been a long time coming and, although we've been disappointed with other locations not happening in past, we really feel this is going to be it this time and we really couldn't be any happier.'

While potential locations at Mill Square Park and Morrow Crescent in Orangeville have fallen by the wayside in recent years, Shannon is confident the proposed site just off Alder Street is the 'best place' for a park she hopes will become a central for both local residents and visitors alike. Having worked alongside the Town's Director of Parks and Recreation, Ray Osmond, and several adjacent neighbours in the area of the proposed site in recent months, Shannon and Valerie hope to see the project move forward without any further hitches.

'It's been a little frustrating seeing two different sites rejected over the years but we're very happy to be here today, almost on the brink of seeing Bravery Park become a reality,' Valerie said. 'It's a truly unique concept and we're excited to, hopefully, be able to bring it to all the residents of Orangeville and surrounding areas.'

Plans for the \$170,000 project include a seven-foot bronze monument, which Valerie says will display a Canadian soldier kneeling beside two Afghani children, a memorial wall, medicine wheel and a playground. One of the key themes pressed home by both McGradys throughout this entire process has been the importance of educating local residents about the Canadian military, with a specific focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the debilitating effects it can cause. With plans now firmly in place for the site, they both feel Bravery Park will be able to do just that.

'One of the big things we want to address with Bravery Park is education. In my opinion, people just don't know enough about our Canadian soldiers,' Shannon told the Citizen at a Bravery Park information session last year. 'Right now we have men and women in more than 25 countries across the world, I want people to talk about them, to think about that.'

She added, 'Right now there are 2,250 Canadian veterans living on the streets because of issues they've had with alcohol, drugs and depression stemming from PTSD. We have had 159 soldiers killed in action in Afghanistan, and 178 soldiers have committed

suicide upon their safe return home. It's really, really concerning.?

With just over \$80,000 already in the bank, the committee is almost half-way to reaching its fundraising goal of \$170,000. Pending council approval, they hope to officially break ground on the project this fall with an estimated completion penciled in for next summer. For the McGradys, following years of hard work, they're just relieved to finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

?Bravery Park will serve as a living reminder of what Canadian soldiers do all across Canada and internationally. We've received so much support from different community groups and residents in general? We're just so happy to finally be here,? Shannon said, with a big smile on her face. ?This park is going to be a place that is celebrated, where people can come to be inspired and educated. It's going to be a wonderful addition to the community.?