

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Tulip ceremony commemorates 70 years

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Communities all over the country will receive tulip bulbs to plant this weekend to commemorate an important day in history.

While the second World War was being fought, thousands upon thousands of lives were lost between 1940 and 1945. During the war, Jewish and some non-Jewish families were thrown in concentration camps, experiencing the harshest of conditions on little food, if any, and facing death every single day. Seventy years ago, Canadian soldiers stormed Normandy, liberating Holland and ending the five-year war.

Between 1942-43, the Netherlands' Royal Family escaped their occupied country and came to Ottawa where their third daughter, Princess Margriet, would be born. After the war ended, the Royal Family returned to Holland and as a way of saying thanks, sent the Canadian government 100,000 tulip bulbs that were then planted in Ottawa.

This Saturday, Nov. 7, at 1:30 p.m., the Dutch Canadian Remembrance Committee will continue with the tradition of planting them in Remembrance Park. But this year, a special twist has been placed on the event.

"To commemorate the 70th anniversary of that gift, which would have been in the fall of 1945, Vesey's Bulbs from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, initiated a project that brought that tradition back to life," John Blaauwendraat, a member of the committee, explained.

With a 100,000 tulip bulb donation from Vesey's Bulbs, communities across Canada are invited to join them in the special event.

"They are offering 100,000 tulips to communities across Canada and there's over 140 communities participating," Blaauwendraat said. "700 tulips were sent to each of those communities to create a tulip garden and commemorate the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands."

To this day, 70 years later, Holland's tradition of sending 100,000 bulbs to Ottawa still continues. But including other communities in the tradition is just as important.

"This isn't something new, this is a tradition that's been carrying on," Blaauwendraat said. "But rather than just having Ottawa as the focal point, it's one of those things where they want communi-

ties across Canada to participate, which is really exciting."

This year, the Dutch Canadian Remembrance Committee was asked to commit to hosting a bulb planting ceremony in the fall and another ceremony in the spring. Both ceremonies, Blaauwendraat explained, are equally important aspects to the committee's role in the local community.



"It's important to us because first of all, we were asked to do that: to promote the project and use it as an opportunity to draw people out in the community," he said. "And it's another opportunity to connect with the people and draw people into Remembrance Park. Remembrance Park really, for us, is a focal point of this project, but also everything that happens around Remembrance Day."

Blaauwendraat's parents were born in the Netherlands during the war and both had to grow up in the harsh living conditions. The two families immigrated to Canada in the 1950s, facing deaths of family members and separations.

"I've always had a heart for the role Canadian soldiers played in liberating our country because in 1944 into 1945, it was a very difficult time for both of them," Blaauwendraat explained. "For me, it's very personal. I've been to Holland a number of times. I've been to Normandy and walked on the beaches. I've attended the Canadian cemeteries. It's just one of those things that I have a heart for."

Some of the flowers have already been planted in Remembrance Park, taking the shape of the Dutch and the Canadian flag.

Blaauwendraat said the special ceremony this weekend isn't just to commemorate the lives of the soldiers we have lost, but to keep people educated on what happened 70 years ago.

"We need to keep the memory alive," he said. "We need to keep people aware

and use it as an opportunity to educate school children, new Canadians and old Canadians on the role Canadian soldiers played in liberating the Netherlands in the 1940s."

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