

We Shall **NOT** Forget

of our Vimy Oak

Vimy Oaks farm to “show them where the barn was and where I used to work and the beehives, all since gone.”

(9) It was only in 2004, when McDonald went to Europe with his wife to retrace his own father’s war experience, and visit Vimy Ridge, that an idea took root. “I didn’t see a single oak tree all along the part of the ridges that we were on, and I thought, Wouldn’t it be cool to get approval to plant a few acorns from the (Scarborough) woodlot at the time of the centennial?” McDonald imagined a few oak trees and a plaque. He had no idea what he was getting into.

(10) “I started mumbling away about doing it,” he laughs. It wasn’t until about 2014 that he got serious. He wanted to gather acorns so there wouldn’t be any issues moving live plants into Europe. He and a forester easily found the French oaks, grown to almost 10 metres high on what is now the property of the Scarborough Chinese Baptist Church. But owing to early frost that year, the acorn yield was minuscule — only about a dozen acorns.

(11) So McDonald and the Vimy Oaks Legacy team he had set up got in touch with the Vimy Foundation and decided on another plan. Shoots from the French oaks were grafted onto

rootstock from British Columbia. Hundreds of descendant trees were grown in quarantine in a nursery near Hamilton. But the process of certification to ship them to France became impossibly complex. By 2015, it became clear approvals weren’t likely to be obtained in time.

(12) In summer 2016, McDonald came up with a contingency plan. He and his grandkids gathered about a hundred of Vimy acorns from the grove of surviving trees on the old Miller farm. He took them to Europe in November and contracted with a nursery in France to germinate them. “They have them in pots... in their greenhouse. The acorns are rooting. So there we go.”

(13) There was, of course, another small matter. There is a lot of unexploded ordnance on Vimy Ridge, McDonald said. “Those things that didn’t explode would bury themselves in the ground in a rather shallow way, along with hand grenades and other stuff.” So the site had to be demined in preparation for creation of Vimy Foundation Centennial Park. (On October 29, 2018, French children from the nearby town of Givenchy-en-Gohelle assisted with the planting of the Vimy Oaks.) Jeremy Diamond, executive director of the Vimy Foundation, said that with contributions from the foundation and federal government, a four-acre tract was purchased just off Vimy Ridge, with good sightlines of the famous

Canadian National Vimy Memorial, for a new education centre and the tree park.

(14) Diamond estimated that 30,000 visitors would be on site for the battle’s 100th anniversary commemoration prior to the event in 2017. In the tree park, a wall listing donors and fixed special stakes — with Canadian flags — indicates the spots where the repatriated oaks were to be planted. It will be “an amazing place,” McDonald said (in a 2017 interview), “... a natural sort of setting of the trees standing on guard.”

(15) At that time, more than 60 Canadians have donated \$10,000 each to have a Vimy Oak planted at the centennial park in memory of a loved one who served in the First World War. And those grafted Vimy acorns raised in the Hamilton nursery? They have been planted at cenotaphs and memorials in communities around Canada.

(16) “It’s truly a legacy project because you’re going to see it for many generations,” said Diamond. The tale of Leslie Miller’s acorns is so improbable “it almost sounds made up.” Yet when the trees descended from those acorns are planted at Vimy, a story spanning more than a century and two continents, linking lives and families, honouring valour and sacrifice will live on, strong as an oak.

— First published in 2017

We Shall **NOT** Forget

Tra-Scott Fire & Safety Inc.

Complete Fire Protection

Inspections • Repairs • Installations • Sprinkler Systems
• Fire Extinguishers • Exit & Emergency Lights
• Fire Suppression Systems • Kitchen Systems • Fire Alarms

16-55 Sinclair Ave., Georgetown, ON L7G 4X4
PO Box 65 STN Main Georgetown, ON L7G 4T1
Tel: 905-877-0055 Direct Line: 905-702-4725
Email: scott@trascottfire.com

D.Scott Campbell

Tel: 905-877-0055 Fax: 905-877-2787 www.trascottfire.com



Complete Collision & Refinishing To ALL Makes & Models

Call **905 877-5720**

Hwy #7, Norval - 490 Guelph St.

Benefit from our experience * Guaranteed Workmanship

- Insurance Claims
- Unibody Repair
- I-Car Training
- PPG Paint
- Towing
- Rental Cars



Sobeys

372 Queen Street
East, Acton,
Ontario
519-853-1960
Open 8 am - 10 pm
www.sobeys.com

