

Students' Remembrance Day video well received



Nov. 18, 2020

By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

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“And because everything has become virtual this year, we thought let’s try to make a virtual ceremony, and everyone was all for it,” she says.

Usually the school will put together a slide show that is shown in the gym, compliments of the school secretary Marta Walczak, according to McEnery.

“[Walczak] put a lot of extra work into it this year to turn it into a movie. Everything was submitted in advance as an audio or video submission and she put it into the slide show. She usually works until 1 p.m. but she stayed late all week to get it done and make sure it was working. I thought it was beautiful. She did a great job,” she says.

Another interesting feature of the video was the students’ “singing” O Canada with sign language. McEnery says that this has become the norm over the last month or so, and stems from the inability of people to sing indoors due to COVID-19 and that singing spreads aerosols from the mouth more readily, leading to an increased risk of viral infection.

“I found a video online of a music teacher showing how to sing O Canada in sign language and we’ve been doing it ever since. I thought it would be nice to have them do it for the video and then spliced them all together with each student doing pieces of the song,” she says.

St. Martin of Tours students Ryan Eagles and Christopher Eagles each recited a Remembrance Day poem they had written last year, 'I Remember Them' and 'I Love My Son' respectively. The Whitney Public School junior class also sang 'I Sing for Peace.'

In addition to the students' input, McEnery and the principal of Whitney Public School, Jessica Poff, said a few words on the video. There were also Remembrance Day comments made by Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board trustee Dr. Peter McEnery, Renfrew Catholic District School Board trustee David Kaiser and South Algonquin Township Councillor Bongo Bongo.

With a background in teaching and a passion for education, Bongo's connection to the local schools began when his band played the annual school Fun Fair back in 2016, an event which fundraises for school activities. Forging a musical relationship with staff and students, he also volunteered to do civic and public speaking workshops with the senior classes after he became a councillor in late 2018. He says that whenever either of the schools gets in touch to help support South Algonquin's youth, he always says yes. He thought the video to commemorate Remembrance Day this year was fantastic.

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McEnery says that she thinks the kids thought the video turned out well. She says that when they first started doing the national anthem with sign language, the kids thought it was tricky.

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Regarding these comments, McEnery thought it was nice to see, and hoped there will be more.

'Hopefully more people will see it and comment also. We also had an email from the chair of our school council, Kelly Nicholas, who was very impressed with the production and wanted to thank all of us for doing it,' she says.

Everyone involved in the video was proud of it, according to McEnery. She says that because everything is virtual now, they've become a lot more used to doing things virtually and working with video.

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In a Nov. 14 email, McEnery revealed that both schools, at the suggestion of Whitney Public School student Hailey, watched the video presentation together via Google Meet.

'We loved this student-generated idea because that way we could all be together though we were in separate rooms,' she says. 'Following the presentation, we presented Marta Walczak, who had spent many volunteer hours putting the slide show together and

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With the ongoing pandemic making it nearly impossible to have any sort of traditional Remembrance Day ceremony, the staff and students at St. Martin of Tours Catholic School and Whitney Public School in South Algonquin Township decided to get creative with their Remembrance Day activities. While a traditional service is usually held in the school gymnasium, they all pitched in and made a video to commemorate this very special day instead, thus honouring all the Canadian veterans who fought so hard to ensure our freedoms, while ensuring they abided by COVID-19 restrictions.

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