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By CHARELLE EVELYN

EMC News - A local group is bringing the act of paying tribute to Canada's fallen soldiers a little closer to home.

The Canadian Veteran Freedom Riders (CVFR), a motorcycle-riding group made up of former military personnel and supporters, has begun to hold repatriation ceremonies at the Orléans legion.

Many riders make the journey to CFB Trenton to pay their respects to soldiers returning home, said Michael "Smokey" Blow, president and founder of the CVFR. However, sometimes there are other obligations that keep them from being able to make the seven-hour trip.

According to Smokey, the Legion's Sergeant-at-Arms approved the idea of holding a ceremony at the local cenotaph following the death of Petty Officer Craig Blake at the beginning of the month.

"We don't mind the rides," he said. "There's just more opportunity for others to come here."

The group held another - of what they hope are not many - of their repatriation ceremonies on the evening of May 16, to pay their respects to Pte. Kevin McKay.

Pte. McKay, the 144th soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002, was killed May 13 - just a couple of days before his tour of duty was scheduled to end.

A convoy of five motorcycles and two cars left from the Tim Horton's on Watters Rd. and made the short trip down Trim Rd. to the cenotaph on Taylor Creek Dr.

A brief ceremony followed with a wreath laid in Pte. McKay's honour and the attendees paying their respects two-by-two.

"Stand down soldier, your work is done," read Mike "Chevy" Chiviendacz, CVFR vice-president.

Smokey, who was wiping his eyes by the ceremony's end, said he usually gets emotional. "It's always difficult," he said, adding that he has been to about 30 repatriation ceremonies in Trenton.

"It's the least we can do to honour them," said Smokey. As a former military fire fighter, he said he felt the loss of Pte. McKay a little more deeply. Pte. McKay was the son of a Toronto fire captain.

Chevy said that he believes that once the community is made aware that this group holds these events, there will be a larger turnout since the community is so military-friendly.

"Orléans is often called CFB Orléans," Chevy said.

Craig Pedersen, a former comrade of Chevy's who served in Namibia, brought his two children to the event.

Mr. Pedersen said it was important for his sons to see Pte. McKay's face in front of the cenotaph.

"After the events of Sept. 11, the whole world changed," he said, adding that there is not a clear picture of the military for them to see now.

Mr. Pedersen officially became a member of the riding club after the ceremony. The CVFR has about 15 members in the Orléans unit. There is another unit based out of Kingston.

The main objective of the group is to honour freedom and support veterans.

"Just because you join a veteran's group doesn't necessarily mean that you support the war," said Smokey. "You support the troops."

The Orléans ceremonies will always be held at 7 p.m. and in conjunction with the Trenton events, which are usually three days after public notice of a soldier's death.