



Holy Heart of Mary Alumnae Choir director Valerie Long leads the choir in a song Friday at the Caribou Memorial Veterans' Pavilion. — Photo by Danette Dooley/Special to The Telegram

MUSIC/SOCIETY

Appreciating veterans

*Choir presents rugs to pavilion,
performs for heroes*

By DANETTE DOOLEY

SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

The Holy Heart of Mary Alumnae Choir made a special presentation of a hooked rug collection to the Caribou Memorial Veterans' Pavilion in St. John's Friday.

Like the veterans who gathered for the event, each of the rugs now hung in the facility's atrium comes with a war-based story.

Each story pays tribute to Royal Newfoundland Regiment soldiers and what happened to them on July 1, 1916 at Beaumont Hamel.

During the Battle of the Somme that day, 800 soldiers of the regiment answered the battle call. Only 68 answered roll call the following day, says project co-ordinator Frances Ennis.

Anne (LeMessurier) Lilly's rug is in memory of her grandfather, Sgt. Francis LeMessurier, who was badly wounded during the Battle of the Somme.

Lilly's rug "Hope for the Wounded" shows two soldiers carrying a stretcher with a wounded soldier.

"So many died, but some were saved and my grandfather was one of them. He led his soldiers out of the trenches and into no man's land," Lilly says.

Choir chairwoman Anne Marie Fleming says the project started about two years ago when the women began planning a trip to Europe in 2008. The trip would include performances at Beaumont Hamel and Vimy Ridge.

Fleming says that Ennis suggested the women craft one rug to put on auction as part of the fundraising initiative.

"When she asked for an expression of interest, there were 34 women who were available to come and do the training," Fleming says.

An accomplished rug hooker, Ennis taught the women the steps in the rug hooking process as they began gathering burlap and recycled pieces of material to work with.

A total of 24 rugs have been donated to the pavilion.

One other rug was presented to the curator at Beaumont Hamel when the choir sang at the historic site on July 1, 2008.

"Each rug tells its own story and together they represent a sincere act of reverence to the individuals and to the families directly impacted by all wars," Ennis said.

Although the project started as a fundraising initiative, it became evident to all choir members that they should not be sold. Rather kept together as a collection.

The choir then sought and found corporate sponsors for the project which allowed them to offer the entire

collection to Eastern Health for the veterans' pavilion.

In addition to the veterans, others on hand for the presentation included Health and Community Services Minister Ross Wiseman and Senator Fabian Manning.

The project goes a long way in telling the stories of the province's veterans, Wiseman said.

The collection will be invaluable not only for today's youth and others, but for generations to come, the minister said.

"There's no way in the world we can thank our veterans enough. Many paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives," Wiseman said.

Manning thanked the choir for its generosity.

However, it was his last remark that drew a loud applause from the women who had performed several poignant songs during the presentation.

The senator committed to helping the choir publish a book about their journey to France and the rug hooking initiative.

"I will do whatever I can on the federal scene to help with that cause," Manning said.

John Adams, 88, was among the veterans attending Friday's ceremony.

"This is all so marvelous. My mother used to hook rugs when I was growing up. So these all bring back pleasant memories," Adams said glancing towards the walls where the rugs now hang.

Sheila Feaver and Diane McDonald created rugs entitled "My Boy" and "My Mother."

"My Boy" depicts a mother reading a letter from her son who is at war, in the quietness of her garden.

In contrast to that tranquility "My Mother" is an image of a young man in the trenches reading a letter from his mother.

Feaver also worked on a rug of a Newfoundland Dog that had been started by Pat Edney.

"Sable Chief was a Newfoundland dog that served as the Royal Newfoundland Regiment's mascot," Feaver says.

She personalized the piece of artwork by using material from her nephew's tee-shirt to form part of the dog's tongue.

Her nephew, Bradley Pierce had served in Afghanistan.

Feaver's father Raymond Tobin Pierce served in the Second World War.

"He died at 60. He died here in the DVA," Feaver says.

It's fitting she says the rug collection has found a home among the veterans.

"It's so nice to be able to give back to those who gave to us," she says.