

Bravery Park in Orangeville will be a living museum, says founder

Written By **Constance Scrafield**

As with many other projects aimed to benefit the public but spearheaded by private individuals, the matter of raising money for Orangeville's Bravery Park is one of the greatest challenges.

Without stumbling, Shannon McGrady and her mother, Valerie McGrady, have been steadfastly collecting money by sponsorships, grants and GofundMe to create Bravery Park and install a statue, a Memorial Stone and a playground, with structures for children to enjoy.

They have achieved paying for the statue of a kneeling soldier being given a butterfly by two Afghan children and the Memorial Stone. The GofundMe page is working on paying for the statue's foundation, although sufficient funds have not yet accumulated.

Next is to build the children's playground, which has been funded by the Amaranth Lions' Club.

Although Ms McGrady has spoken about the purpose of the Bravery Park to a considerable extent, as it has been coming along, it was interesting to have her talk about her feelings and the in-depth philosophy behind the inspiration for creating the first Bravery Park in Canada.

To be sure, the death of her brother and Mrs. Valerie McGrady's son, Cpl. Matthew McCully, stirred their hearts to do something and this Bravery Park was the result of their ambition.

Said Shannon McGrady, "My mother and I noticed Canadians are ignorant of what vets are doing. A lot of them are struggling with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Because primarily this park is not just to honour soldiers and fallen soldiers. This is a living museum to come to the park for education. The role they [soldiers] play in Canada and overseas, the world you don't want them to go to, you're frightened for him.

"In 2007, they forced the Taliban out of Afghanistan. They had to practically rebuild the structure of the country. They were training Afghan soldiers to defend and rebuild. They were rebuilding or establishing government in municipalities, doing humanitarian work and, although the mission finally ended in 2014, Canada continues to assist in security, diplomacy and human rights and development in Afghanistan."

She said, "The more I read, the more I understand, we don't know anything about what they're doing there. Here, with the vets, they're sharing facts about homelessness and suicide."

In total, \$200,000 will go into the project and Shannon McGrady has been questioned about the option of giving all that money to the veterans about whom she is so concerned, rather than spend it on this park.

Says she, "I could have given them this money but no one can talk about something they don't know ? it ?s going to become part of our dialogue, year after year, to our children. I don't think our soldiers think in terms of killing at first when they go over for a peaceful, a humanitarian mission."

She informed us, "At first, only 2,000 girls were going to school [in Afghanistan]. Now, three million are enrolled in school.

"Now, the question is ? are we helping? We need to truly understand what they're doing and what they stand for.

"We have to try to understand what they went through. Then, let's talk ? campaign about mental health. The more we talk about our soldiers, the more support they will have. The rate of suicide is staggering. The military can't counsel anyone who is not on duty. Anyone with mental health can get help but there's a lot of paper work for a vet to get help."

This is personal for Ms. McGrady: "Bravery Park is a small thing but if it gets people talking, like with poverty ? a lot of people in Orangeville don't know there's a soup kitchen in Orangeville ? the more we don't talk ? the less we know."

She commented, "The first thing about any cause is to get awareness. Then, the community can come together."

They have also established a Make your Mark: Bravery Park Art Project. "In keeping with our goal of involving young people and ultimately educating them on the roles of our Canadian Forces, we [the Bravery Park Committee and the Amaranth Lions Club] have invited [them] to design one of the panels we're featuring in the new playground."

Shannon McGrady has been a teacher by education and training but is now working at the Orangeville Public Library. "The educational part of Bravery Park is important," she remarked.

Her job at the Library suits her very well. "There's good outreach; it's local and good hours for my home life."

About the statue for Bravery Park, she told the Citizen, "It's bronze, seven foot tall because the soldier is kneeling. There's a memorial stone."

"This is a living museum. Someone can be there to help explain and tell people what it's all about. There are story boards ? the committee will write those."

All well and good, but she is also concerned to keep an eye on the future. She mentioned this too, "The goal is to keep it relevant, keep it going. My mother has been invited to give speeches to service groups and to support organizations as well."

What about the vets' organizations?

"I don't know about them." With so many vets seemingly abandoned, she grieved for them and said, "It might be part of military culture, to bury with its stoicism, to hold feelings back because they have to get [the job] done."

She said, "When we walk by a man/women in uniform we shake their hand, when they are on the street with their hand out, we walk by them. If we aren't talking about them-they won't talk to us and seek the support they need."

When they come home, Canadians are not saying enough, "How can we help?"

There is to be a soft opening in this summer for the playground, the only one its kind at the moment in Canada. For more information and other details, you can go to the website www.braverypark.ca Donations can be made through: www.gofundme.com/braverypark