

Brock's Banter: Cracking open a two-four with purpose]

by Brock Weir

It's that time of year we've all been waiting for: the 'unofficial' start of summer.

Never mind that summer proper will still take another month to get here, give or take a few days; if we have an opportunity, even early, to get into that easy, breezy summer mindset, I'm all for it.

Summer did indeed arrive early this past weekend, even if Mother Nature did do a little fancy footwork to fake us out and bring things back down on Monday to more seasonable temperatures.

And people enjoyed it to the fullest. Our trails and parks have been hopping, our sports fields have been packed, and our water features - ponds, kettle lakes, and, yes, even well-kept and deceptively picturesque stormwater management ponds - saw a booming business.

We Ontarians are subject to harsh winters, a season which, thanks to reasons we all know about, is becoming increasingly unpredictable. So, even if we're jumping the gun on the whole summer thing, let's just count it as our just reward after the long stretch of November to April.

As much as I welcome the start to summer - official or otherwise - it's also a season of one of my biggest pet peeves: the evolution of the so-called 'May Two-Four' weekend.

It seems that Victoria Day, a double-barrelled holiday that is not only to celebrate the May 24-born Queen Victoria, a woman often dubbed the 'Mother of Confederation', but it is also designated as the Monarch's Official Birthday, whoever he or she might be at the time.

It's served as the 'official' Canadian birthday of Edward VII, George V, Edward VIII (although he only stuck around as King for a single May), George VI and his daughter, Elizabeth II - all of whom, with the possible exception of the eventual Duke of Windsor, have, in my opinion, served this country well and continue to do so.

Maybe that's why I bristle just a little bit every time I hear the days leading up to the Monday itself as 'the May Long Weekend' or, in the case of people who simply associate the 'unofficial start of summer' with popping open a cold brew, the aforementioned 'May Two-Four'.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to pour cold water on anyone's summer fun - I've been anxiously awaiting it myself - but it feels like yet another occasion that has been stripped down from its purpose and rebranded in the most generic way possible.

It's not the only example, either.

This country is rife with holidays and observances which are either just mentioned in passing or simply serve as footnotes on the calendar.

On February 15, how many of us celebrate Flag Day?

'We have a Flag Day?' you might ask yourself, perhaps thinking that this was strictly an American thing.

Yes, National Flag of Canada Day is indeed February 15 - but, outside of a few cursory tweets from our politicians or civic-minded organizations, it's a day that typically comes and goes with little more than a whisper.

Last month was Vimy Ridge Day, an anything-but-statutory holiday introduced by the Government of Canada in 2003, following a campaign led by a veteran of the Korean War, to commemorate those who took part in what historians argue was Canada's most decisive battles and an integral stepping stone on our road to true nationhood. Aside from flag-raising and talks spearheaded by local Legions, museums and historical societies, it came and went with very little notice.

Lost amid Christmas, Hanukkah and other religious observances in the late fall and early winter is an official holiday which marks the anniversary when Canada became a nation truly autonomous from the United Kingdom ? but, aside from the display of the Royal Union Flag outside of government buildings, this very important date in our history as a country is just an ordinary December 11.

Then there's the thorny issue of just what are we celebrating in August? Yes, of course, we're celebrating and enjoying a well-earned holiday Monday, but are we commemorating the legacy of John Graves Simcoe (for better or worse) as the name Simcoe Day suggests? Well, in some parts of Ontario, the answer is yes. In theory. If you're in Guelph or Ottawa, you're commemorating John Galt and Colonel By respectively.

Many provinces have declared it a day to celebrate just that, the province as a whole, but Ontario is an outlier ? so we just enjoy the day as it unfolds paying little attention to just why we have the day off.

Yet this Victoria Day is a unique one. It's a chance to celebrate the continued legacy of the Queen of Canada in her Platinum Jubilee year ? an occasion that has never before been celebrated by a Canadian monarch.

With some imagination, it could be a day to celebrate and recognize not only her service to Canada, but the significant advancements we have collectively made as a nation since the start of her reign in 1952: leaders, innovators and advocates who have helped shape our country; the recognition and advancement of the rights of peoples who have been historically marginalized in these lands well before Confederation; the emergence of our nation on the world stage; and the continued examination of just who we are as a country.

?Over the course of her reign, Her Majesty has been a constant presence in the life of Canadians, offering steadfast leadership in times of change, hardship or uncertainty,? said the Prime Minister at the start of the Platinum Jubilee year. ?She has shared in some of the proudest and most memorable moments in our recent history ? from the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Confederation in 1967, to the Montreal Olympics in 1976, to the proclamation of the Constitution Act in 1982. Her Majesty is the patron of more than 600 charities and organizations, including 36 in Canada. To this day, she continues to show our country her devotion and generosity, and to champion our most cherished values of unity, peace and freedom.?

Unity, peace and freedom are three words that are oft-mentioned in today's heated political climate, but I think we can agree they are values that are indeed cherished however we define them.

If we must crack open a Two-Four this weekend, let's raise a can or glass, even if just for a moment, to Victoria Day and what ? and who ? it really represents.