

Vimy oak tree planted at Husky

By Bill Rea

Vimy Ridge was a place of bloodshed and death during the First World War, but there is now an effort to spread life from it.

That life is in the form of oak trees, and their ancestry can be traced back to the time before the battle.

One such tree was recently unveiled at Husky Injection Molding Systems Ltd. in Bolton.

Husky CEO John Galt observed the grounds at Vimy are barren, but there was a time oaks grew there, and the efforts are underway to make them grow again, as a memorial to those who fought and died there.

Lt. Leslie Miller had been a farmer who was raised in Scarborough and was at Vimy. He found some acorns and had them sent home. They were planted, and those seeds continue to this day.

The trees are being distributed through Vimy Oaks Legacy and the Vimy Foundation. Monty McDonald, president, director and repatriation project manager with Vimy Oaks Legacy, said the plan is to plant 100 trees next year at Vimy. He added the saplings are already growing in France. And they also want trees, like the one at Husky, planted all over Canada.

He said he knew Miller, having worked on his farm in his youth.

"I came to love him like the grandfather I never had," he McDonald said, adding Miller passed along a lot of skills and values.

He said Miller had been a teacher, and spent four years fighting the war.

"He soon realized it was a stupid, senseless war," McDonald remarked.

He also said that when Miller had leave, he would go to farms and offer to work for free for a couple of weeks, in return for room and board. He had hoped to return to teaching after the war, but McDonald said he contracted scarlet fever, and ended up taking on fruit farming, mentoring a lot of people who worked for him.

Jeremy Diamond, executive director of the Vimy Foundation, said it was formed about 10 years ago in an effort to keep the stories from the war relevant.

"We have to make that effort today," he said.

Diamond said he had the idea to bring the trees back to France, but he didn't have the trees. But that was solved when he connected with McDonald.

"We're creating a legacy project for the next hundred years," he said.



Those on hand for the recent tree unveiling included The Vimy Foundation Executive Director Jeremy Diamond, Walter Yovdoshuk of the Tottenham branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, Monty McDonald of the Vimy Oaks Legacy, Wendell Jack of the Tottenham Legion and Husky Injection Molding Systems Ltd. CEO John Galt.

