

Project Hero growing

EDUCATION: Loyalist first college to join

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Today, Belleville -- tomorrow, the country.

Kevin Reed says his plan to provide free education to the children of fallen Canadian soldiers has been successful locally and continues to grow.

Reed, a Belleville native, Toronto businessman and honorary lieutenant-colonel of the military's 31 Canadian Brigade Group service units, teamed up with retired general and chief of defence staff Rick Hillier, now chancellor of Memorial University, to create Project Hero earlier this year. The campaign is an effort to get all Canadian universities to provide free education to children of troops killed while on active service.

The plan expanded last week when Loyalist College president Maureen Piercy, the new honorary colonel of Trenton's 8 Air Communication and Control Squadron, announced the Belleville school will become the country's first college to join Project Hero.

"We are proud to offer the scholarship program at Loyalist beginning in September," Piercy said. "This is an important recognition of the incredible work of individuals in the Canadian Forces as they serve our country every day.

"As Canadians we must be mindful of the individual sacrifices which are being made on our behalf. Project Hero is one way to provide that recognition."

Reed, reached Sunday at his property on Manitoulin Island, said the project has also won the support of seven universities: Memorial, Carleton, McMaster, Concordia, and the Universities of Ottawa, Calgary and Windsor. He's in talks with at least four more.

"It's really gained momentum," Reed said. "It's been much faster than I thought."

He said he'd hoped to first secure the universities before branching out into colleges, but that Piercy's quick support has put Project Hero ahead of schedule. The pair met in July at Trenton's Canadian Forces Anniversary Weekend and Piercy's support was immediate.

"I'm just thrilled that Maureen picked it up and drove it through her school," said Reed. "Loyalist College is a valuable link in our national initiative."

Reed said the response from fellow honorary military officers at CFB Wainwright, Alta. at a recent meeting was "tremendous."

"A lot of them are associated with universities," he said. "Many of them offered to pick up the phone and make the calls for us."

One new supporter is Andrew Molson, vice-chairman of Molson Coors Brewing Company and honorary lieutenant-colonel of the Royal Montreal Regiment.

"The military families' response has been unbelievable," Reed added.

Reed said he received an emotional e-mail Sunday morning from the wife of a Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan. She thanked him and Hillier for starting Project Hero, noting she hopes to be able to enroll her son in the program.

"It nearly brought tears to my eyes," said Reed. "I'm probably getting a half a dozen to 10 notes a week from people.

"It's been a tremendous bonding experience between the military community and the schools," said Reed. "A lot of them have said, 'Wow, we didn't think the schools cared.'"

Reed said he expects major progress this fall as more schools enlist and a new website is launched.

"By Christmas I hope to have most of the country locked down," he said.

Despite what some may have thought, said Reed, convincing school board members is the easy part; arranging the talks is more tricky.

"Once you get them on the phone it's a short discussion."

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Recipients of the Loyalist College Project Hero scholarship must be under age 26 and a dependent of a Canadian Forces member killed while on active service.

Each must also be registered as a full-time post-secondary student at Loyalist in a program eligible for provincial funding.

Applications will be available through Loyalist's awards office. They must be completed, and eligibility confirmed by the Canadian Forces, within the students first full-time semester.

Details are available from the awards officer at 613-962-1913 ext. 2202.

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