



Saugeen Shores–Zonnebeke Proposed Sister city relationship

Bridging generations
Click to add Text
Shaping the future

Community Support

- MPP Lisa Thompson
- Chamber of Commerce
- Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command
- Royal Canadian Legion Southampton Branch 155
- Saugeen District Senior School
- Historian Bill Streeter

expression of interest - Cathy McGirr, Bruce County Museum

Shared History

- 3,824 - Bruce County
- 478 Saugeen Shores & Saugeen First Nation
- 58 never returned
- 7 in Flanders Fields



Why Zonnebeke?

- Battle of Passchendaele
- Tyne Cot Cemetery , Flanders
- Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917
- twinned with Waimakariri, NZ—a proven partnership model.







A SOLDIER
OF THE GREAT WAR
46TH BN. CANADIAN INF.



KNOWN UNTO GOD



1914-1918



Artilleur Gunner

CLARENCE ROY WILSON

Artillerie canadienne Canadian Field Artillery

Allenford, Ontario Allenford, Ontario



Anciens Combattants
Canada

Veterans Affairs
Canada

Canada

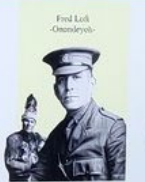


Alex Decoteau
Member of the Cree and Plains Indian Nations
Ojibway nation
First Canadian Indigenous Police Officer
Edmonton Police Service
Abn In 1927 - 1913 October 1917

Under the Wings of the Eagle

Canada's Indigenous People in the Great War

Legacy of Pashchamankala
Map of the area



*Member of the Cree Red Pheasant Nation
First Canadian Indigenous Police Officer
Edmonton Police Service
Olympian athlete
49th Bn CEF
KIA 30 October 1917*

Remembering Alex Decoteau

14:30-15:10

Unveiling Ceremony plaque

Adres(s) & parking

's Graventafelstraat 36, Passendale

15:30-16:00

Ceremony

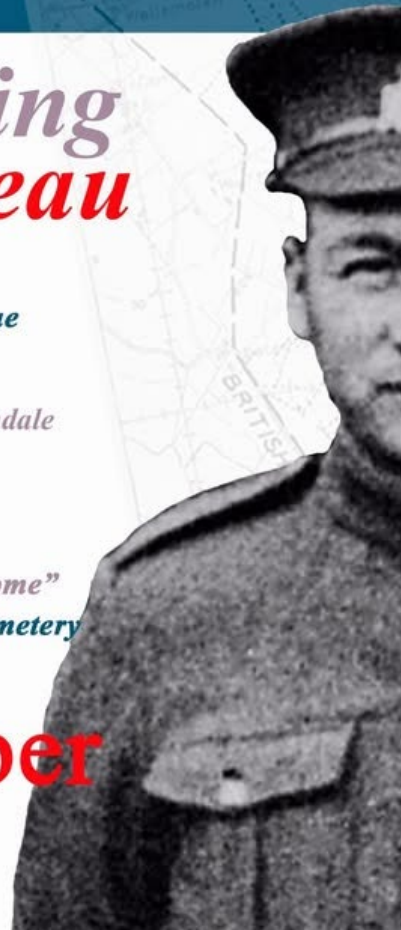
"Bringing The Spirit Back Home"

Passchendaele New British Cemetery

8 November

Organisatie: Passchendaele Society 1917 vzw

i.s.m. Edmonton Police Force, Gemeente Zonnebeke,



Birth of Our Nation

Canada's National Story

- 12,000 Canadians rest in Belgium
- Seven from Saugeen Shores
- The maple leaf still flies on Canadalaan, Passchendaele

“Canadalaan” (Canada Lane)







52nd
CANADIAN CORPS

Lance Corporal
JOHN SASKOWICH
52nd New Ontario
Battalion CEF
Killed in Action
28 October 1917

Lieutenant
COLLEMAN AILEY MCGONIGLE
85th Battalion
Nova Scotia Highlanders
Killed in Action
28 October 1917

THE CANADIAN CORPS
IN OCTOBER 1917 ADVANCED
ACROSS THIS VALLEY THEN
A TREACHEROUS MORASS
CAPTURED AND HELD THE
CRENDON HILL



THE CANADIAN CORPS
IN OCTOBER 1917 ADVANCED
ACROSS THIS VALLEY-THEN
A TREACHEROUS MORASS-
CAPTURED AND HELD THE
PASSCHENDAELE RIDGE

HONOUR TO CANADIANS WHO ON THE













Similarities Between Our Communities

- Agricultural roots and a strong rural identity.
- Tourism and heritage economy.
- Deep remembrance culture
- 20,000–25,000 residents.

Benefits to both Communities

- Culture & Heritage: museum and remembrance partnerships
- Education: school and youth exchanges
- Tourism & Economy: Global Viability
- National Profile: connection to our Nations story

Global Partnership

- peace, remembrance, and global friendship
- Strengthens Canada's international connections trade, shared history, culture
- Extends local heritage to the world stage

Next Steps

- Letter of greeting and interest to Zonnebeke
- Meeting Mayor, Alderman, Museum Chair
- Explore a Friendship Agreement modeled on Zonnebeke–Waimakariri

Closing Thought

- In a time of global uncertainty and fading remembrance, partnerships like this renew our sense of identity and pride.
- Together we give lasting meaning to our history, and ensure that Canada's story continues to be told.

Lisa Thompson, MPP
Huron-Bruce

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September 30, 2025

To Whom it May Concern,

As the Member of Provincial Parliament for Huron-Bruce, I am pleased to extend my strong support for the Sister Cities International partnership between the Town of Saugeen Shores and the Municipality of Zonnebeke, Belgium.

This initiative represents a meaningful opportunity to strengthen cultural, educational, and economic ties between our communities. The shared history and values that connect Saugeen Shores and Zonnebeke will be enriched through collaboration, exchange, and friendship fostered by this partnership.

I commend both municipalities for their vision and commitment to building bridges across borders. This Sister Cities relationship will not only recognize and honour our past connections but also create new opportunities for learning and growth for generations to come.

Please accept my best wishes as this partnership moves forward. I look forward to seeing the many benefits it will bring to both Saugeen Shores and Zonnebeke.

Sincerely,



Lisa Thompson
MPP Huron-Bruce

Cc: Luke Charbonneau, Mayor, Town of Saugeen Saugeen Shores
Koen Meersseman, Mayor, Municipality of Zonnebeke
Ingrid Vandepitte, First Alderman, Municipality of Zonnebeke
Joachim Jonckheere, Second Alderman, Municipality of Zonnebeke
Thijs D'Alleine, Third Alderman, Municipality of Zonnebeke
Dirk Sioen, Fourth Alderman, Municipality of Zonnebeke
Frans Deleu, Fifth Alderman, Municipality of Zonnebeke

Saugeen Shores Chamber of Commerce
September 16, 2025.

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Support for Saugeen Shores – Zonnebeke/Passchendaele Sister City Project
On behalf of the Saugeen Shores Chamber of Commerce, we are pleased to express our enthusiastic support for the Saugeen Shores – Zonnebeke/Passchendaele Sister City Project.

We see this initiative as a unique and meaningful opportunity to:

- Strengthen cultural and educational ties between Saugeen Shores and Zonnebeke/Passchendaele, including collaborative museum programs, student exchanges, and joint commemorations.
- Promote international awareness of our community, its heritage, and its tourism potential, creating opportunities for local economic and cultural growth.
- Engage our schools, residents, and organizations in activities that foster pride, global citizenship, and shared historical understanding.

The Chamber of Commerce is committed to being an active partner in this project. We are pleased to serve as the long-term mailing address and point of contact for the initiative, ensuring a stable and consistent hub for correspondence, coordination, and communication.

We look forward to collaborating with the Town of Saugeen Shores, the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre, local schools, and our partners in Zonnebeke/Passchendaele to make this project a lasting success.

Respectfully,


Erin Aldridge
President
Saugeen Shores Chamber of Commerce



23 September 2025

File:14-3

To Whom It May Concern:

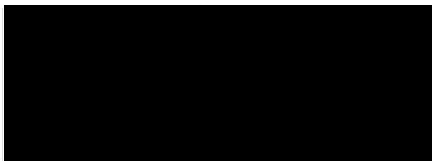
I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the sister city project between Saugeen Shores, Ontario Canada and Passchendaele. This initiative is long overdue and holds profound significance in honoring the shared history between our communities. Passchendaele is a pivotal symbol in the founding of our nation, and this project will further strengthen the bonds between Canada and Belgium.

John Willetts, a dedicated member of the Saugeen community, has a long-standing commitment to supporting military heritage and commemorative events worldwide. His involvement in events in Yokohama, Vimy, Passchendaele, and his representation of the Royal Canadian Legion in London, England this November, truly highlights his dedication and passion for preserving the legacy of our armed forces.

This letter of support emphasizes the importance of building and nurturing these international relationships and is an important step toward fostering perpetual remembrance, respect and understanding.

Thank you for your consideration and support in this meaningful initiative.

Sincerely,



Randy Hayley
National Executive Director





13 Grosvenor St N
Southampton, ON
N0H 2L0

September 30, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Branch 155, I am pleased to express our strong support for the proposed sister city initiative between Passchendaele/Zonnebeke in Belgium and Southampton/Saugeen Shores in Ontario, Canada.

This initiative seeks to honour the memory of the 3,824 men from Bruce County who served in the First World War, many of whom made the ultimate sacrifice on Belgian soil, while fostering cultural exchange, educational opportunities, and strengthened ties between our communities.

Branch 155 recognizes the importance of this project in promoting remembrance and international friendship. The effort is being led locally by John Willetts, a past president of Branch 155, who has long been active in remembrance initiatives world wide.

We are committed to supporting this initiative through participation in related events, commemorations, and community programs as the partnership develops.

We fully support this initiative and encourage all relevant parties to provide guidance and encouragement as it progresses.

Sincerely,

Derek Johnston
President
Branch 155



Saugeen District Senior School

Charlotte McFarlan, Principal
Jodi Naves, Vice-Principal
Sarah Flowers, Vice-Principal
Shawna Davidson, Office Manager

780 Gustavus Street
Port Elgin, ON N0H 2C4
Telephone: (519) 832-2091
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25 September 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am delighted to express my wholehearted support for the proposed sister educational partnership between the institutions in Saugeen Shores and Zonnebeke, Belgium. This collaboration promises to bring a wealth of educational benefits to students and educators on both sides.

For students in Saugeen Shores, this partnership will enrich their educational journeys by offering deeper insights into European history, culture, and languages, broadening their global perspective. Similarly, students and educators in Zonnebeke will gain invaluable insights into Canadian culture and heritage.

Moreover, the partnership will foster both in-person and virtual exchanges, allowing students to connect and learn from one another regardless of geography.

Additionally, incorporating the appreciation of Indigenous cultures will enable students to understand and celebrate the rich heritage of the First Nations in Canada, adding meaningful depth to their educational experience.

This partnership is a mutually beneficial endeavor, enriching the educational journeys of all involved and building lasting connections between our communities.

Thank you for considering this exciting opportunity.

Warm regards,

Charlotte McFarlan
Principal
Saugeen District Senior School

The Relationship between Zonnebeke and Waimakariri



History of the

Twinning Relationship

The Battle of Passchendaele was one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War, particularly the Battle of Ypres. During 100 days of 1917 there were 500,000 casualties.

A large number of New Zealanders fought and lost their lives, especially on 12 October 1917 when 846 young New Zealanders were killed in the first four hours of the battle. D Company from Rangiora and C Company from Kaiapoi were part of the Canterbury Regiment that fought in the area, and it's believed that at least seven men from the district lost their lives there.

The impact of the World Wars on this region of Belgium was significant and remembering those events is of great importance to the people of this area.

Following an invitation from the Burgemeester (Mayor) of Zonnebeke-Passchendaele in 2007, a twinning relationship was established between the Municipality of Zonnebeke and Waimakariri District Council. While the relationship is not as formal as a sister city relationship, it does recognise the significant and enduring connection between our two areas.



The Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 in Zonnebeke



The formal signing of the twinning relationship was made on 5 October 2007 when the Mayor (Jim Gerard QSO) and Deputy Mayor (Jo Kane) visited Zonnebeke. They were accompanied by Graeme Matheson, Secretary/Treasurer Rangiora RSA, and Kevin Brown, Kaiapoi RSA President.

In April 2009 a delegation from Zonnebeke led by Mayor Dirk Cardoen was hosted by the Council, the visit culminating with attendance at the Kaiapoi, Rangiora and Christchurch ANZAC Day services.

A visit was also made in 2009 by the Chair and Curator of the Memorial Museum Passchendaele (1917) in Belgium to coincide with the travelling exhibition – ‘Passchendaele: The Belgians Have Not Forgotten’.

In October 2013, Graeme Matheson from Rangiora RSA, Mayor David Ayers, Councillors Dan Gordon and Kevin Felstead returned to Ypres, Belgium to attend a special service at the Passchendaele museum.

A group of Rangiora RSA members was formed in 2014 to attend the Passchendaele centenary commemorations in Belgium and subsequently representatives of the Waimakariri District Council and 45

Rangiora RSA members took part in the commemoration on 12 October 2017.

In 2018 the Council approved the establishment of the Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group to provide oversight of the District’s international relations and cultural links with the Municipality of Zonnebeke, Belgium, and support the ongoing commemoration and remembrance of the Battle of Passchendaele 1917 and World War One.

In March 2018, the Council officially opened the Passchendaele Memorial Path, a walking and cycling link between Kaiapoi and Rangiora.



The Passchendaele Memorial Path was officially opened on 3 March 2018 in Kaiapoi

Message from

The Mayor

Kia ora

It is a privilege to be able to commemorate the strong connection forged between Belgium and New Zealand as we approach the 105th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele where 846 New Zealanders lost their lives over a period of just four hours.

The huge loss of life still stands as the greatest one-day death toll ever suffered by New Zealand forces. More New Zealanders are buried in Belgium than in any other part of the world, with over 12,000 service personnel buried or commemorated there.

At least seven men from the Waimakariri District lost their lives during the Battle of Passchendaele and many more were wounded and injured. The sacrifices they had made at such an early age impacted on me when I attended the 100th anniversary of the Battle Passchendaele in Belgium five years ago.

During the official 100th memorial service at Tyne Cot the hairs on the back of my neck stood up as, like many, we had family who fought at the Battle of Passchendaele.

My thoughts turned to my uncle from Belfast, a Sergeant Major at Passchendaele, who suffered a serious respiratory infection for the rest of his life because of his exposure to mustard gas.

One positive aspect that emerged from this bleak battle was the ongoing friendship and



respect between New Zealand and Belgium. This is reflected in our twinning relationship with the province of Zonnebeke, where members of C Company from Kaiapoi and D Company from Rangiora formed part of the Canterbury regiment which fought in this area. We formalised this important relationship in 2007 with the Council and representatives of both Kaiapoi and Rangiora RSAs.

The warm welcome and hospitality of the Belgians will stay with me forever. They are eternally grateful for New Zealand's sacrifice and this respect is reflected in the immaculate condition of all the graves and memorials to our fallen service personnel.

While we can never thank those who gave the supreme sacrifice during the Battle of Passchendaele, we can always remember them and not forget that it is due to their sacrifice that we enjoy our freedom today.

Ngā mihi

Dan Gordon, Waimakariri Mayor



At Tyne Cot Cemetery for the 100th New Zealand commemoration of the Battle of Passchendaele with my mother Elizabeth.

Message from

Chair of Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group



Kia ora

As the Chair of the Waimakariri Passchendaele Advisory Group, it is an honour to be involved in producing this information booklet which will further the understanding of the important relationship between our District and the Municipality of Zonnebeke in Belgium.

The importance of commemorating the Battle of Passchendaele and the strong connections forged between Waimakariri and Zonnebeke cannot be underestimated, and while over 100 years have passed since the date of this battle the connections between us continue to grow. Each year we find new ways to strengthen the bond between us.

In the space of a mere four hours, 60% of the New Zealanders who took part in the Battle of Passchendaele were either dead or wounded, marking it as the bloodiest day in the history of our young nation.

At the time of the Great War the population of Waimakariri District was around 18,000, with most people living rurally. Nearly every family was impacted by the Battle of Passchendaele.

Zonnebeke residents have never forgotten the sacrifices made by New Zealand soldiers. This remembrance is still very much alive today and the official twinning relationship between our two districts has formalised this deep bond that we share.

It is my sincere hope that our connections will continue to grow as we exchange cultural values built on our shared historical bond which was forged following the Battle of Passchendaele.

I would particularly like to encourage the younger generation of Waimakariri residents to learn more about this important part of our history. I am sure that many families have personal stories to pass down regarding their forebears who were involved in this battle.

Let's continue to grow our strong bonds and learn more about each other so we can pass our stories on to the next generation.

Ngā mihi

Neville Atkinson, JP
Waimakariri Deputy Mayor



Message from

Lieve Bierque Honorary Consul of Belgium



However, over the years the ceremony has also acquired a wider significance.

So, when the bugles blow, it is not only the soldiers of the British Empire who are being honoured, but also their comrades from France, Belgium, America and many other Allied lands, who likewise “stood firm and did not count the cost”.

At the same time, thoughts may also turn to those who fought on the other side of no-man’s land: enemies then, but partners now in a new, united Europe.

In this sense the Last Post not only represents a mirror of our past, but also a beacon of hope for all our futures.

The Belgians have not forgotten and will not forget.

Lieve Bierque



Source references:

lastpost.be/
[ww100.govt.nz/the-menin-gate-last-post-ceremony-an-enduring-tradition](https://www.100.govt.nz/the-menin-gate-last-post-ceremony-an-enduring-tradition)

Message from

Freddy Declerck Honorary Captain RNZN



Kia ora

It's a huge honour and a real privilege for me to contribute to this pamphlet on the strong connection between the Waimakariri and Zonnebeke districts.

New Zealand soldiers served in Zonnebeke (Passchendaele is a village of Zonnebeke) in 1917-1918 and they had many losses. Of the 4,633 New Zealanders dead in Belgium, 1,937 are buried or missing in Zonnebeke. Most were from Canterbury, many from Waimakariri. This connection between our districts is so important because their sacrifice should never be forgotten.

For the people here, the New Zealanders who visit are seen as pilgrims. Most of them understand very well how difficult it would have been for NZ families, 100 years ago, to imagine where their men fought, were wounded, gone missing or been killed. Through the twinning of our Districts we are connected in a more direct way and for us, the people of Waimakariri represent the New Zealand families with losses here.

We share a similar landscape as Canterbury and we are both regions of agriculture. There are more similarities, as we are both young countries which had to struggle to become independent nations.

When I visited your country, I felt at home because of the warm reception, the care for us and above all the friendship. The way you remember your dead with memorials in the different villages on ANZAC Day is exactly what we do in our villages on Armistice Day. We honour our dead the same way and here we honour yours as well.

It is my wish that the bond between the two districts will become stronger in the future so we can continue the remembrance and commemoration of those who have given the ultimate sacrifice, and for families who could not come over to mourn over the graves of their beloved father, husband or son. It's not always easy because we are separated by half a world, but with some good will, a lot is possible. I also hope we can build interest in our shared story with the youth of both districts/countries.

I believe we should give it a try, never give up, kia kaha.

Ngā mihi

Freddy Declerck



Freddy at the graveside of a NZ Captain



Laying a wreath at the main gate as part of the New Zealand commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele, October 2017.



Mayor Dan Gordon's grandfather served in WWI





The flags of Belgium and New Zealand.



Alderman Joachim Jonckheere of Zonnebeke laying a wreath on behalf of Waimakariri on 12 October 2021, remembering the losses New Zealand suffered.

Message from

Ian Thompson President Rangiora RSA



Rangiora RSA's involvement with the twinning of Waimakariri and Zonnebeke, Belgium.

In October 2007 a party of four people attended the 90th anniversary of the battle of Passchendaele, Belgium. They were Graeme Matheson, Secretary/Treasurer Rangiora RSA, Jim Gerard, Waimakariri Mayor, Jo Kane Deputy Mayor and Kevin Brown, Kaiapoi RSA President.

This meeting confirmed the twinning agreement between Waimakariri District Council and Zonnebeke Council, Belgium.

There has been a strong relationship between the two Councils ever since.

In October 2013 Graeme Matheson on behalf of Rangiora RSA, Mayor David Ayers, Councillors Dan Gordon and Kevin Felstead returned to Ypres, Belgium to attend a special service at the Passchendaele museum.

A group of 75 Rangiora RSA members was formed in 2014 to attend the 12 October 2017 commemoration, Belgium.

Waimakariri Council and 45 Rangiora RSA members took part in the commemoration.

Ian Thompson



Message from

Neill Price JP President Kaiapoi RSA



The Kaiapoi RSA is honoured to join with other contributors in the production of this important document which intends to enhance the already well recognised unity between Waimakariri and Zonnebeke since 1918.

From 1914 to 1918 many men and woman from Waimakariri travelled to the other side of the world for what was to be called the Great Advance.

Unfortunately many did not return.

Every evening at the Menen Gate a ceremony takes place to honour New Zealanders and other nations in true military style.

This has led to both Districts coming together as friends.

This friendship has endured and is to be encouraged even more in the future so we can both continue to honour their contribution to our way of life.

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.

L. Neill Price QSM QFSM JP





WAIMAKARIRI
PASSCHENDAELE



waimakariri.govt.nz