

The new Veteran; reimagining the legacy

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GUEST COLUMN: Little red poppies in the lapels of overcoats, carefully pinned there for a small token of pocket change, have come to symbolize Remembrance Day. For many of us, perhaps owing to the sensibility of the "me generation" and the relatively peaceful period in the world prior to 9-11, this was once one of the few times in the year when we gave more than a passing thought to our veterans and the sacrifices they have made – and are making – every day. Yet a new poll by Nanos Research, commissioned by Commissionaires, suggests we have a newfound respect for those who put their lives on the line every day for this country; nearly 90 per cent of Canadians believe we have an obligation to ensure they have meaningful employment upon their retirement from the Canadian Forces and 88 per cent believe reservists should have their civilian jobs protected while they serve their country. Perhaps it is a signal — and a long overdue 'correction' — in our thinking about what really matters, not just on November 11 but every day of the year.

Despite this new surge of national appreciation, our perception of just who is a veteran is still stuck in the Cold War era. More than two thirds of Canadians imagine someone over 40 when they think of the term "war veteran." Given the fact that the young men and women returning from missions as far afield as Kandahar now number in the thousands, this Remembrance Day may be an ideal time to take a closer look at the "new veteran" — and just who they are in our communities.

This was one of the main reasons behind this poll, says David Blaney, CEO of Commissionaires New Brunswick. "We really hope that the results of this survey allow us to address some misconceptions about who veterans are, so we can draw attention to the great work so many of them do every day with Commissionaires divisions across the country. "

Commissionaires, established in 1925 to provide meaningful employment for Canadian veterans returning from conflicts, has remained more than true to its mandate. It has expanded its service lines from private security solutions to include bylaw enforcement, digital fingerprinting services and security consulting and training. While its evolution reflects the greater role commissionaires are called upon to perform in communities across the country, it also is a direct result of the new skill set many of its recruits now bring to the job from their time with the forces.

Blaney adds that beyond the incentives of new challenges in security solutions, many returning veterans are pleasantly surprised by how easy it is to find the right fit in the organization, given the current economic picture. "We are probably one of the few businesses in Canada that can currently say we are not thinking of downsizing, but we are actually looking to hire many new recruits across the country in the coming year. As local policing budgets are stretched to their limits, Commissionaires is thriving."

However, the private security industry is also one of the most competitive in Canada. When asked how Blaney can account for the fact that Commissionaires has a leading role in its market, he attributes it to one thing and one thing only: "It's the people. The veterans and reservists we have on the job are absolutely vital to our organization and the work we do."

Absolutely vital to Canada and our place in the world as well. And now more than ever, that is a perception that has found currency 365 days a year.

Submitted by Commissionaires of Canada