

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF PONOKA

Christmas miracle in Ponoka

By Tiffany Williams
Editor

I'll be home for Christmas has a very special meaning to Cpt. Trevor Greene and his fiancée Debbie Lepore after receiving a new van that will take the veteran home for the first time in nearly 24 months.

On Dec. 11 Greg Edmond and Theresa Hacking from the Military Casualty Support Foundation (MCSF) arrived in Edmonton from Ontario. They drove to Red Deer to pick up the van to take to Ponoka and Hacking flew out at 5 p.m. the same day. They delivered a brand new 2007 Dodge Grand Caravan worth close to \$50,000 that is now 100 per cent Greene's and Lepore's.

"We worked with the military in Ottawa and they work with different institutions that make vans for people who are handicapped. It is from Shopper's Home Network," said Edmonds. "It is a fully equipped van, it has wheelchair accessibility so that Debbie will be able to take Trevor home for Christmas. From here forward as he goes through his recovery she will be able to take him out of the rehab centre. Letting him have a greater quality of life is what the objective is at this stage of the game."

Greene has been at the Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury since July. He is in a wheelchair

after being attacked on March 4, 2006. He was a reservist with the Vancouver based Seaforth Highlanders and was in Afghanistan for less than two months. He was injured when he was attending a gathering of elders in a village outside of Kandahar. He had removed his helmet and lowered his weapon out of respect for the elders when he was hit from behind with an axe to his head. He was induced into a coma and was in a German hospital and then in a Vancouver hospital for 13 months before coming to Ponoka.

Lepore and their young daughter now live in Ponoka and are both very excited to have Greene home for the holidays. They plan to make their first trip home for the holidays on Dec. 22 in their new van. As Lepore brought Greene out to see the new van for the first time there was a smile that never left her face.

After she put him in it for the first time in a near whisper he expressed his gratitude.

"God bless you for coming so far," said Greene. "This is beyond great! It means the world to me, thank you so much."

Lepore went with Edmonds and Hacking to pick the van up in Red Deer at Shoppers Home Health Care, with tears in her eyes and the elated expression on her face said how much it meant to her.



TIFFANY WILLIAMS/Ponoka News

Theresa Hacking, left, from the Military Casualty Support Foundation, presented Afghanistan veteran Cpt. Trevor Green and his fiancée Debbie Lepore a brand new wheelchair accessible van. Also present from the foundation is Greg Edmond. Insert are Lepore, holding the keys and Green, all smiles from the donation.

"I'm speechless, there's no words that can describe what it means to be together as a family," said Lepore. "It's the best thing that could happen not only for Christmas but for any day of the year. Just to have a little bit of a normal life in all this craziness. It's awesome it's beyond words, it's very heart warming."

The MCSF is a new organization that held their first fundraiser in May. They work closely with the Department of National Defence and were

giving Greene's name as someone who might benefit from the organization.

"We started this foundation because Greg[Edmonds] and my husband are in partnership and we do a lot of defence work and we thought it would be good to give back to the military," said Hacking who founded the organization. "We wanted to give back and Cpt. Green's case came up as somebody who needed some extra help so this is where some of our funds are going."

They received Green's file in September. At first Lepore didn't know if he would make it home for Christmas. But with hard work and dedication from all involved he will be home soon.

"To be able to do something like this is a wonderful feeling, it's not too often you get the opportunity to do something that changes a person's life and this is a life changing event," said Edmonds. "It's a pretty amazing thing to be able to do. To get yourself in a position

where you can do something of the magnitude that this represents and to allow the family something that they can have now with no consequences to them at all. They now have a brand new, fully equipped van, with no bills to improve their quality of life and that's what should happen."

The MCSF made Lepore and Greene's Christmas wishes come true and highlighted some of the true meanings of Christmas, the gift of giving and being with family.

New budget passes for the New Year with six per cent tax increase

By Eraina Hooyer
Staff Reporter

The 2008 Town of Ponoka interim operating and capital budget was passed at town hall Dec. 11. The operating budget for 2008 is \$11.2 million with the town's total assessment being \$481.3 million, an increase of \$18.6 million from 2007. The town has increased property taxes by six per cent for \$214,000 to cover inflation and operational growth. Based on the average assessment value of \$200,000

a taxpayer will pay \$84 more in 2008. Because of the increased growth in the town almost half of the six per cent increase is for the new RCMP officer for the town with the rest contributing to 1.5 new positions in water utilities and public works, half of a position in planning and 0.65 of a position in finance.

The operating budget is an estimate of the town's annual financial needs to run the town by providing programs and services to the residences of

Ponoka.

"We have a very good budget this coming year which is comparable to the last one," said director of corporate services Betty Quinlan. "There are not very many changes in the operating budget and some changes in the capital budget mostly due to the municipality sustainability grant which is geared to help the municipality make sure the infrastructure is up to date."

"We have done an in depth review of the budget

and compared it to last year. From this we assess what the town needs and adjust it accordingly," said Quinlan. "We really try to keep it reasonable. We look at the levels of service and maintaining those levels. The cause of change in the budget for 2008 is mainly because of the increased growth and activity in Ponoka."

The 2008 capital budget totals \$10.7 million with new funding of \$829,000 from the Municipality Sustainability

grant as well as the continued funding from the Alberta Municipal Infrastructure grant of \$1.2 million. This budget is an estimate of items to develop various infrastructures such as buildings, vehicles, land, roads, sewers and equipment. Some of the projects will include the redevelopment of the railway crossing on 57 Ave., road infrastructure and water sanitary upgrades, projects and sewer rehabilitation, town vehicles and building rehabilitation. Additional

funds were set aside for the long awaited tourist booth project.

The recent changes of Ponoka's housing market have resulted in large increases in residential property assessments. These rapid changes have made it difficult to correctly assess the municipal mill rate. The mill rate, based on the physical state of property as of Dec. 31, will not be known until the final assessment figures are submitted.

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