

**VOLUNTEERS CAN TRANSFORM LIVES OFFERING HOPE, SUPPORT, AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY TO INDIVIDUALS IN NEED. GIVING BACK THROUGH VOLUNTEERING IS A SELFLESS ACT THAT CREATES A RIPPLE EFFECT OF HAPPINESS AND FULFILLMENT.**

In honour of International Volunteer Day, we're spotlighting an exceptional CFMWS volunteer, Kevin Brown.

When he relocated to Ottawa from BC and into semi-retirement in 2024, Kevin Brown was looking for a way to give back. He had no personal connection to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). But as he reflected, with gratitude, on his life as a husband, father, community contributor and as a Canadian, Kevin had a realization: His comfort and security were largely due to the service men and women who are often the "first to respond" and the "first to answer the call to protect", and he wanted to find a way to say thank you.

**"Who retires to Ottawa?"**

A little more than a year ago, Kevin Brown and his wife, Tracey, were on a regular annual trip from Prince George, B.C. to see their son in Ottawa. They were walking their son's dog, and discussed the idea that maybe they should move East permanently. The two lead an active lifestyle, enjoying cycling, paddling and hiking. And they love the green capital. Less than six months later, in March 2024, they packed up their 2400-square-foot family home and downsized to a townhouse in the south part of the city. "People I meet in Ottawa say we were doing it backwards, and who retires to Ottawa?" says Kevin with a laugh. "Most people from Ontario want to retire on the West Coast, with more forgiving temperatures. But I can tell you, Prince George gets pretty darn cold in the winter."

**Time to reflect on what matters**

Kevin was well-known in Prince George as a public relations consultant. He started his career in radio news there in his late twenties, worked briefly on the north coast and Vancouver, and moved back to Prince George to figure out his future. Although he had two "kids in high school and half a mortgage to pay," he launched his own consulting firm in early 2003.

Through his work, Kevin became well-known in the small city, not just for the events he helped host, but also through his essential work with local governments, businesses, industry and First Nations communities and organizations. Throughout his career, Kevin was rarely missed at annual fundraisers, frequently asked to emcee events with his popular, upbeat radio voice. Over the past decade, he never missed a local Remembrance Day ceremony.

Although his father served with the Royal Air Force in the Second World War, and he has a friend in the Canada's Reserve Force in Prince George, Kevin had never considered a career with the military, and he doesn't have a personal connection to the CAF. It was only after he and Tracey began to plan their semi-retirement and their impending move to Ottawa that Kevin started to consider how he would ramp up his community service, as he reduced his paid work hours.

"I've entered what I consider my next chapter in life, and I had some time to reflect on the opportunities I've had and what Canada is, despite our challenges," says Kevin. "Our military men and women have been first responders to natural disasters, they go overseas to protect our country and our security, and I started thinking about their essential role in my life in Canada. I wanted to do what I could to show up as a volunteer and say thank you."

**Navy Bike Ride 2024**

A friend in Ottawa suggested he start getting to know the community by volunteering. So, after the initial moving-day shock wore off, Kevin turned to the internet to see what he could discover about the city, and how he might get involved in supporting the military. A quick Google search landed on the CFMWS website.

"Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services seemed like an organization that was doing exactly what I wanted to do – serve those who serve," says Kevin. A month later, after a Teams meeting with the volunteer group, Kevin was on the ground at Ottawa's Navy Bike Ride and Run. He was given a very warm welcome from Susan Sloan, National Volunteer Coordinator, who jokingly asked all the team to "be nice to the new guy."

"They're a great group, a lot of fun," says Kevin. "No one takes themselves too seriously, which gives us a lot of time to tell jokes and do silly things and just enjoy being out there with the CAF."



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By 6:30 AM, Kevin departed Hog's Back Park on his bike and spent the rest of the morning riding up and down the course between volunteer stations as a "bike marshal" to make sure everyone had what they needed. "I put my bike aside at one point and just stood alongside the course cheering on the cyclists and chatting with other volunteers," said Kevin. "There was so much enthusiasm. It exceeded my expectations."

**Canada Army Run 2024**

Kevin stayed in touch with Susan over the summer. Even as he upped his golf game, and he and his wife volunteered at a local organic farm, Kevin was excited for the next CFMWS volunteer opportunity with the Canada Army Run. Arriving at City Hall early in the morning on September 22, Kevin was impressed with how organized things were from the get-go.

When he saw – and felt -- the magnitude of the event, Kevin knew he'd made the right choice volunteering with CFMWS.

"They didn't tell me ahead of time that I'd be saying hello to 50,000 of my newest friends in Ottawa," Kevin says with a laugh. "What I really liked about the Army Run was the integration of the community, the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans. It was seamless support. It didn't matter if you were a current member or just out there to raise funds for Support Our Troops and Soldier On, everyone was just out there as Canadians."

"I could feel they were thankful to be there and thankful for our troops, as I was," says Kevin.

**Wreaths Across Canada**

In October, Kevin reached out to the volunteer team again, asking if there was some way he could continue to contribute. He connected with Michelle Levesque, Wellness Coordinator at CFMWS, and a member of the Board of Directors and the volunteer Social Media Coordinator with Wreaths Across Canada. The organization was preparing for the annual laying of the wreaths ceremony at the National Military Cemetery at Beechwood in early December.

Kevin also volunteers with other organizations, including the Ottawa Food Bank, and he's slowly building up a community and a network to help him settle in the National Capital Region.

A big highlight of his time as an Ottawa resident has been the CFMWS volunteer opportunities. Kevin says he's incredibly grateful for service that allows him to continue to feel connected to the CAF and Canadian Veterans.

"I want to contribute in an active way to say thank you to our troops," says Kevin. "I can write a letter or attend a Remembrance Day ceremony, which I do. But when you get to volunteer, serving those who serve, meeting current and past military members, it's an active way to say thank you for all they have done for us."