

Snowbird from Orillia praises efforts to put on air show

As a fellow Orillian, I would like to echo the sentiments of the Orillia District Chamber of Commerce, which recognized the Orillia Foundation with their Hats Off award for the 2009 Orillia Air Show. This event was a tremendous success with more than 30,000 spectators in attendance. This would not have been possible without the hard work of the Orillia Foundation, the staff of the Lake Simcoe Regional airport, the Ontario Provincial Police, and the great number of volunteers who worked diligently to organize and run such a large event for the City of Orillia.

As a Snowbird pilot, I have flown in more than 200 air shows all across North America during my time on the team, and I can honestly say that the warm welcome and hospitality given to the Snowbird team by the Orillia Foundation, and the people of Orillia, was second to none. As some of you may recall, the Snowbirds were on an operational pause in the days leading up to the Orillia air show due to an issue with our lap belt. As a result, the team was in jeopardy of cancelling our appearance at the Orillia Air Show. The organizers, like Wendy Timpano, were sympathetic to our situation and gave us a great deal of support in the days leading up to the show. Upon getting clearance to fly again, the Orillia Foundation quickly jumped into action to finalize the last details to ensure the safe and effective success of the show. Numerous people worked long hours and our every need was met in a manner that was transparent to the Snowbirds. The attention to detail demonstrated by the Orillia Foundation ultimately led to a successful event that was enjoyed by my fellow Orillians, young and old (as told to me by my friends and family).

The staff members of the Lake Simcoe Regional Airport went "above and beyond the call" in providing professional servicing to our 11 jets by assisting ground crew and providing security to our jets alongside our friends at the OPP. We appreciated the overall positive "can do" attitude that was demonstrated by Mike Drumm and all of his staff.

The OPP also celebrated a very important milestone last year. All members of the OPP, and in particular the Golden Helmets, were a positive influence on our team during our visit, and the Snowbirds were honoured to serve alongside them during our stay in Orillia.

No air show, or any major event like the Orillia Air Show, could take place without the selfless effort of people who volunteer. The enthusiastic people of Orillia truly stepped up and freely gave of their time to ensure the great success of the air show. A fundraiser was also held at Casino Rama while we were visiting Orillia, which again would not have taken place without the gracious effort of a large number of volunteers, and as such the event help raise a large sum of money for charities of Orillia.

In closing, I would like to personally give a big Snowbirds "hats off" to the Orillia Foundation. In my role as a Snowbird pilot, I have the honour of demonstrating the skill, professionalism, and teamwork of the men and women of the Canadian Forces on a daily basis as I travel across our great nation and meet with people from coast to coast. It is people like those with the Orillia Foundation, OPP, Lake Simcoe Regional Airport, and the countless volunteers from Orillia, who make me proud to serve my country and proud to call myself an Orillian.

Capt. Mark LaVerdiere Snowbird 8, lead solo