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Cirillo honoured in charity rowing race

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By **Alana Thoman**

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Boots 4 Pups — a local chapter of the Citadel Canine Society — teamed up with Canoe Kayak Canada and organized an inaugural canoe and kayak fundraising challenge in honour of Cpl. Nathan Cirillo, the reservist shot to death while standing guard at the National War Memorial on Oct. 22, 2014.

Almost two years after the tragic shooting, the Memorial Cup Challenge commemorated his sacrifice and raised money to support military veterans, first responders living with post-traumatic stress disorder and the training of service dogs in order to aid them.

Ian Miller, a spokesman for Canoe Kayak Canada, said it was a great opportunity to do something nice in his memory.

“It was a tragedy that moved the entire country and from that I think you try to bring something positive out of it,” he said.

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“It was about the community coming together to commemorate the life of this individual by doing something significant and that is about the best you can do.”

The event started on Oct. 1 at the Rideau Canoe Club with a moment of silence for Cirillo, followed by a four-kilometre paddle for the 20 or so recreational paddlers who participated.

The next day was a 25-kilometre race known as the elite regatta with six portages for competitive clubs from as far away as Toronto.

Miller estimated there were about 150 athletes entered in the competitive event.

After Cirillo’s death, his family and the Hamilton regiment where Cirillo served were bombarded with more than 400 requests to have rights to use his name, according to Barbara Boucher the director of Boots 4 Pups.

After the family looked into the work Citadel Canine does across Canada, they reached out to the organization to notify them that they would be entitled to use his name.

“We were so happy to receive Nathan’s name and this is the first time we are able to actually share it with everybody,” Boucher said. “It’s really amazing when you say there were over 400 applicants and all the stories that come behind that.”

This particular connection made sense, because Cirillo loved rescue dogs and had two of them himself, according to Boucher.

The Memorial Cup is a tall, silver trophy with a photo of Cirillo in his uniform on the front.

The Rideau Canoe Club won the elite regatta event.

The club’s name will be engraved onto the trophy, as well as that of Kevin Thomson, winner of the four-kilometre challenge.

Boots 4 Pups is the Ottawa chapter of Citadel Canine Society and works to raise awareness and funds for the umbrella society to deliver more dogs to those in need.

The cost of training a service dog runs as high as \$5,000, according to Boucher, and the canoe-kayak event alone raised almost \$6,000.

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Boucher said her group has been trying to find an event that would be a good fit for Cirillo, Ottawa and her organization.

She said it was like a puzzle coming together choosing a canoe and kayak challenge.

“Ottawa is the meeting place for the rivers and canoe and kayaking is such a relaxing sport for people who suffer from PTSD, as they love to participate in the calm sports,” she said.

Ottawa resident Martin Magnan experienced Cirillo’s death first hand as he was the first civilian to arrive at the scene after hearing the gun shots. Magnan held Cirillo’s hand as he passed away.

After experiencing what he calls the most “tragic” and “critical” thing that has ever happened to him, he said he is happy to see people carrying on Cirillo’s name for a good purpose.

“I think it is important to keep in mind that things can easily be taken away from us,” said Magnan. “He was the victim there because of where he was and the uniform he was wearing,” Magnan added, “and I think that it is something I hope that we keep in mind that what we do as a nation and who represents us isn’t free — there is a cost and he paid the price for all of us.”

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