

RED FRIDAY

Councillor Ed Gibbons: *"Proud to support our troops!"*



EDMONTON - On several occasions last fall, drivers approaching Edmonton's southern limits on the Q.E.II Highway may have been surprised to see fire engines parked at conspicuous locations on the overpasses and along the highway.

If they had looked up they may also have noticed an unmarked airliner descending into the International Airport closely escorted by two CF-18 fighter jets.

These are just two aspects of the "Welcome Home" given our troops returning from overseas missions. As the flight from Europe enters Alberta airspace it is met by the CF-18s from CFB Cold Lake. Once the troops have landed and cleared customs they are greeted by a delegation offering them the traditional Canadian welcome of Tim Horton's coffee and donuts.

They then pile into buses with a VIP police escort through the City. 97 Street leading to the base at Namao has become known as the Yellow Ribbon Route. The trees and lamp standards lining this route are ringed with yellow ribbons.

From the first appearance of the CF-18s on the wingtips of the airliner, to the final departure of the police escort once its convoy has arrived at the Base, Albertans deliver a message of pride and pleasure at seeing our troops returning safely home.

The official welcome is coordinated by the Edmonton Salutes Committee comprised of 30 members representing our business community, various levels of government and military units associated with Edmonton.

In addition to greeting the troops, the committee organizes or coordinates several other initiatives with the overall objective of paying tribute to our military personnel and their families, and to build on the historic ties between the City, the surrounding communities, and the military units connected to Edmonton.

With each returning flight, Edmonton has an opportunity to show its appreciation. On July 24, 2009 – RED FRIDAY – the Edmonton Salutes Committee invited everyone to wear red in honour of our troops.

Mayor Stephen Mandel issued a proclamation officially declaring RED FRIDAY and inviting all citizens to show their support. Red shirts were available for purchase at various venues, a special flag was unveiled and a military band performed in Sir Winston Churchill Square during the noon hour. The entire downtown community was encouraged to participate.

It is hoped citizens throughout the region will take a moment, whenever the occasion arises, to offer a prayer, best wishes, or a simple "thank you" to the brave men and women who truly stand on guard for thee.

-- Anthony Druett, Edmonton