

Memories of veterans inspire young community change-maker, Tedario Speranza, to renew solidarity among Canadians.

BY SARAH FOX

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMIE NAPIER AND CAITLIN MCMANUS

Tedario Speranza lives in the present by honouring the past.

As a boy, the Montreal youth remembers his father, Rocco Speranza, instilling in him the importance of Canadian veterans and the impact they had on our nation's history; their sacrifice—as he learned—was something never to be forgotten.

The teen's memory of his first Remembrance Day ceremony at age five has become a defining moment in his life. For his father, it was an opportunity to teach his son the story behind Canada's free and peaceful society. "He wanted me to understand that the Canadian and allied veterans risked their lives to make our great country—and others around the world—the free and peaceful places they are today."

With Canada's 150th just around the corner, Tedario is utilizing the anniversary to encourage fellow citizens to unite and join in strengthening our shared community. "On July 1, everybody should work to put aside differences," Tedario suggests. "We can put our ideas together and work toward a common goal of peace and unity."

When working together as one, community bonding expands beyond geographic borders. In Tedario's own family, the proof of this is etched in its lineage. During a conversation with a Canadian veteran and friend, Tedario's father was surprised to hear that while this man was a tank operator and ground forces officer in Italy, he had helped liberate Reggio Calabria, a small town near Sicily that Tedario's grandparents had called home.

History lessons, such as this, are something Tedario keeps close to his heart—a habit he's picked up from his father. A proud son, he is happy to follow in his father's footsteps and continue welding present and past together in order to forge future growth.

Take his involvement in Vincent Massey Collegiate's (VMC)—Tedario's school—Remembrance Committee for instance, which hosts special events to honour veterans, including luncheons where they share stories with students. (Notably, the committee was established by Rocco Speranza.) And then there's the fact that at age 13, Tedario has already participated in eight Remembrance parades.

On top of his busy work volunteering with veterans, Tedario has been at the helm of several WE campaigns and works closely with his church and former pre-kindergarten school to raise funds for local projects and global initiatives, such as sending goats to rural China—an effort he is currently writing a book about. "It's about how a simple donation of a few dollars could really impact someone's life," he says of the book's topic. "In rural China, they can get food from the goat, they can get milk and sell what comes from the goat. It is a great opportunity."

A heart full of appreciation and a brain enriched with critical history lessons, it is Tedario's pledge to bring awareness to the importance of commemorating veterans year round. "I've worked with them for a very long time... as time goes by, many of them pass away," he somberly notes. "It's important to remember them and share the stories of what they've done."

Read on to learn why Tedario believes Canadians must band together as we work to foster an inclusive country informed by the lessons of our past.



Q&A

Why is “we” stronger than “me?”

When we work all together, we can get a lot more done. I work with my school, my church, the pre-kindergarten that I went to, *and* my classmates. We get it done that way.

What is the kindest action you've been on the receiving end of, and what about the gesture touched you personally?

My parents have always helped me. My father got me into WE Day and helped start my passion for Remembrance Day. He has also taught me that showing compassion and kindness to those in need is important.

Fill in the blank: Moving forward into the next 150 years, our country needs more [blank] in order to build a caring and compassionate Canada.

Unity.

By putting aside different ways of thinking and working together to make everybody feel included.

Describe the core values of your ideal Canada?

Everything would be very peaceful. Everyone would stand together.

Nominate one person you believe is working to positively change the future of Canada.

A lot of people at WE Day, like Mikey Campanella—a student who went to my school. He’s been working with kids, teaching them how to be leaders and how to work together in elementary schools. He sets the tone for other youth.

As we work to make Canada a better country, what is one action you would like people to take?

Everyone should think about the things they can do to help someone, rather than put them down. If someone is different—or if they’re feeling sad or angry—we should help them, not make fun of them or exclude them.

Tedario's pledge (<https://www.we.org/stories/montreal-teen-advocates-for-remembrance-day-and-veteran-rights-for-canadas-150th/>) is to remember the past to create a better future.
What will your pledge be? Take the pledge (<https://www.we.ca/>) and help build a more caring and compassionate Canada.