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Sailor gets personalized coat of arms

A/SLt Christopher Mackie was granted a graphic representation of his family's history when the Governor General's office approved his coat of arms

Shelley Lipke
 Staff writer

A/SLt Christopher Mackie, a naval reservist at *HMCS Malahat*, has been honoured through the Governor General's office with a coat of arms.

Historically, coats of arms were popular traditions in England and Scotland and used by knights to identify them from enemy soldiers. But in Canada they are granted by the federal Crown to honour an individual's service to the nation or local community.

"For me it's a very meaningful representation of my family's history and it forms part of my identity," said A/SLt Mackie. "This coat of arms is something that I'll be able to pass on to my own descendants and through it they will be better aware of their heritage."

In September 2001, both A/SLt Mackie and his mother applied to the Governor General's office to each establish their own coat of arms. "My mother has a Loyalist history and was interested in seeking a coat of arms symbolizing that," he said. "For me, heraldry has always been important as I grew up in a traditionally-minded Scottish family."

So with the help of heralds in Ottawa, they began designing their individual coats of arms. The reserve sailor worked on a design that drew on his family heritage. An artist was contracted to create a draft drawing of the arms, and later painted it. Then the document that accompanied the coat of arms was signed and sealed by the Governor General's office.

"If you look at the two coats of arms [his and his

mother's] side by side you will see similarities and can tell that our families are related," said A/SLt Mackie. "But each coat of arms is unique to the individual."

A winged cougar grasping a sword recognizes his father's service with the Royal Canadian Air Force, and a special golden coronet recognizes his mother's ancestor who fought as a Loyalist against secession in the American War of Independence.

"It is a graphic representation of a family's history that is passed on through generations in perpetuity," he said.

A/SLt Mackie's interest with heraldry goes beyond his new coat of arms.

"As a child I had a large map of all the heraldry of the clan chiefs on my wall, and I always wanted to learn more about it," he said.

He is now a member of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada and uses his knowledge of heraldry to help other Canadians design and apply for their own coats of arms.

"There is a common misconception that every family has a coat of arms, but this is not true. A coat of arms belongs to one person and no two are ever alike," he said. "As a member of the Royal Heraldry Society of Canada, part of our mandate is to encourage interest in heraldry amongst Canadians. By making people aware that the Governor General's office has this kind of program, it might encourage others interested in their heritage to seek their own coats of arms," he said.

Anyone can apply for a coat of arms, but they must show evidence that they are of good character through some kind of community or national service.

"My mother is a good



Shelley Lipke, Lookout
A/SLt Mackie holds up a carving of his father's coat of arms.

example. She didn't have military service, but she volunteered at local schools, delivered Meals on Wheels, volunteered for the air cadets and is a painter who worked on paintings for community projects," said A/SLt Mackie.

Even people who don't know enough about their family history can still start based on their own life experience to create a coat of arms. This way the symbols created for them will be passed on to future descendants.

"I've helped a number of people including several friends and family members with applying for their coats of arms," he said. "We look at connections of family history and personal life experiences to come up with a pictorial representation for people

while striving for concision and simplicity."

The costs associated with establishing a coat of arms is from \$2,000 to \$3,000, and includes the fees for commissioning the artwork.

Once a person has their own coat of arms, there are many possibilities to show it off. "I'm thinking about having a flag made, using it on my letterhead, and putting it on my website," said A/SLt Mackie. "Some people use it as a pipe banner that flies from bagpipes, or embroider it onto luggage and backpacks. It's a great way to identify your bags when they are coming off the carousel at the airport."

For more information on how to apply for a coat of arms see http://gg.ca/heraldry/pg/index_e.asp

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