When the government of Canada announced plans for a major commemoration ceremony to mark the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge at the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France on April 9, 2017, schools across Canada began planning educational excursions. Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board (PVNC) would be sending students from our Ontario secondary schools in Peterborough, Cobourg and Clarington. As part of the trips, our students would be visiting First and Second World War sites in England, Netherlands, Belgium and France.
Goals and Objectives:

The 100th anniversary provided more than an educational experience. The milestone created a significant amount of media and public interest – fertile grounds for mounting a Communication Strategy to promote Vimy 100 celebrations at PVNC. During times of remembrance, there is a natural public interest in stories focussed on educating students about the sacrifices of past generations. In the lead up to the 2017 celebrations, Communication Services developed a Communication Strategy to allow PVNC to take full advantage of this interest and the Vimy 100 exposure.

Goals:

• To ensure the experiences and voices of our students and educators embarking on Vimy 100 trips were highlighted in their local media markets.
• To create a bounty of stories and images Communication Services could use to promote PVNC widely during the Vimy 100 celebrations and beyond.
• To bring a first-person perspective to these stories by having the Communications Manager travel with one of the groups and share first-hand experiences in real time through a variety of communication tools.
• To enhance the profile of schools attending Vimy 100 tours in their home communities.

Objectives:

• To leverage local media in the Peterborough, Cobourg and Clarington communities to promote the experiences of our students and educators before and during the Vimy 100 trip.
• To utilize our relationship with the largest daily newspaper in our jurisdiction to publish a column featuring timely dispatches highlighting our students’ experiences in Europe.
• To leverage social media such as Twitter and Facebook to tell the stories of our students and educators in real time and allow our audience to follow the trip on a daily basis.
• To offer media the opportunity to interview our students from the sites in Europe so their stories were told during the height of the Vimy 100 exposure.
• To get greater value and reach a larger audience by repackaging local media stories as Facebook ads.
• To package all the media and social media coverage into an engaging presentation that could be shared internally within PVNC and with the PVNC Board of Trustees and beyond.
Research and Situation Analysis:

The most important element of the Communication Strategy was to send the Communications Manager to accompany one of the school trips to write a series of stories that would be published by local media. This would ensure that the Board could control the message and focus on the experiences of PVNC students exclusively.

There were three separate PVNC school trips attending Vimy 100 in three separate communities – Peterborough, Cobourg and Clarington. It was important to identify the school community that would garner the most media attention.

The Communications Manager chose to attend the Peterborough trip because the Peterborough media market enjoys a widely read daily newspaper – *The Peterborough Examiner* – and a widely watched TV news station – CHEX TV, both of which were interested in running multiple stories over the duration of the trip.

Neither Cobourg nor Clarington have daily news outlets in their communities, meaning the opportunities to share timely dispatches from the trip would be limited. The Communication Strategy focused on alternative means to engage the local media in these communities.

Target Audience:

- The broader public
- Parents
- School communities

Strategy/Execution:

The cornerstone of the Communication Strategy was a series of four well-promoted columns that the Communications Manager wrote for the *Peterborough Examiner* while accompanying students from St. Peter and Holy Cross secondary schools on a 10-day educational trip to Europe. These columns were widely read and were published with multiple photos of PVNC students. The columns appeared in print and online. The third column, highlighting the students’ reflections on the April 9, 2017 Vimy Ridge commemoration in France, landed on the front page of the newspaper (see Additional Documentation), which provided a high degree of visibility in the community for the students and teachers on the trip and for PVNC.
To engage the local media in Cobourg and Clarington, the Communications Manager reached out to local media weeks before the departing trips, connecting local reporters directly with local teachers and students both before and during their time in Europe. This proactive approach meant the coverage of the PVNC trips received far more attention locally than other similar trips in those communities.

*Northumberland Today*, the main newspaper in Cobourg, featured St. Mary Catholic Secondary School students on the front page and a timely article in *Clarington Today* focused on the experiences of St. Stephen Catholic Secondary School students during the Vimy 100 commemoration. In that case, the reporter connected with students directly in France.

As well, the Communications Manager connected CHEX TV in Peterborough with students and teachers in Europe during the Peterborough excursion on multiple occasions, resulting in several stories for the local TV news broadcast.

Throughout the trip, the Communications Manager Tweeted daily about the students’ experiences, allowing parents, members of school communities and the broader public the opportunity to follow the trip in real time. Stories and photos about the trip were also shared on the Board’s Facebook page and boosted with Facebook ads to reach larger audiences.

Following the trip, Communication Services packaged stories, photos, quotes, social media and news clippings into a comprehensive presentation that was delivered to the Board of Trustees by the Communications Manager and several students who had attended the trip. This presentation was also shown to Ontario MPPs during a special day at Queen’s Park in Toronto.

**Evaluation:**

- The four-part column in the *Peterborough Examiner* reached an estimated 75,000 households and the columns received between 700 to 2,000 unique page views online according to analytics provided by the newspaper. This increased the local profile of both Peterborough high schools that attended the trip.
- The Cobourg and Clarington trips received high profile coverage in their local media.
- The value of the combined media coverage far outweighed the financial cost of the trip for Communication Services.
- Tweets during the Vimy 100 trips were re-tweeted and favourited hundreds of times and resulted in dozens of new followers to the PVNC Twitter feed.
- Vimy 100 Facebook posts received a combined 35,232 impressions, 724 likes and 55 shares.
Quotes from Facebook viewers:

“I’m incredibly proud that you kids went over there! You did us proud, and learned a heck of a whole lot there too I’m sure.”
- Matt Drysdale

“These students will never forget this amazing learning opportunity. Wish I could have been there with them, such a privilege.”
- Butch Bellhouse

“An unforgettable trip. Bravo to the organizers.”
- Catherine Caron

Resources:

Financial:

- $4,415.99 – cost of Vimy 100 trip for Communications Manager
- $85 – combined cost of five Facebook ads promoting Vimy 100 coverage

Human Resources:

- Communications Manager travelled with students for 10 days and created all communications material.

Results:

- The voices and experiences of our students were widely told and promoted during the national commemoration period.
- Communication Services created and shared a bounty of engaging stories, photos and media articles, resulting in a significant amount of positive promotion for the Board and participating schools.
- Through the Peterborough Examiner columns, the PVNC community and residents of Peterborough were offered a great way to experience and follow the Vimy 100 celebrations through the eyes of our students.

Additional Documentation

Please see below links to all four Peterborough Examiner columns written by the Communications Manager, additional media coverage, examples of Tweets and Facebook posts and the final presentation that was given to the PVNC Board of Trustees and later used to promote the PVNC Vimy 100 experiences with Members of Provincial Parliament in Toronto.
Destination: Vimy Ridge for Peterborough Catholic students

Link to column: https://goo.gl/fY0p8t

Summary: This column introduced the trip and set the stage for the three columns that were written during the duration of the 10-day trip.
Incredible experience for students

Link to column: https://goo.gl/U6nnYC

Summary: This column focused on the students’ experiences at Anne Frank House Museum and the sites of Amsterdam.

Friday, April 7, 2017

Incredible experience for students

Peterborough high school students tour Anne Frank House Museum on their way to Vimy Ridge Memorial

GALEN EAGLE

Guest Columnist

Holy Cross Secondary School student Jessica Nilson said she had studied Anne Frank in school and had always been moved by her story. On Thursday, Nilson ascended the narrow, rickety stairs leading to the annex that hid Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis in occupied Amsterdam. Nilson read passages from the original Anne Frank diary.

“I had chills running through my body as I walked through there. I had read about it in school, but to actually be in the building and be in the room where she wrote her diary and lived in for two years is really incredible,” Nilson said.

Nilson joined about 50 of her peers from Holy Cross and St. Peter Catholic high schools in the visit to Anne Frank House, which, as one of the biggest tourist draws in Amsterdam, attracts more than 4,000 visitors each day and 1.4 million visitors a year.

It was Day 2 of a nearly 10-day educational trip beginning in Netherlands and moving on to Belgium and then France, where these Peterborough students will join more than 25,000 Canadians commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

“It is really shocking to be at the place where this thing happened, to know that there was a girl my age living there in such terror every day and she couldn’t leave the attic of this place. She had to be quiet all the time. I don’t know if I could ever do that,” said Audrey Blasorah, a Grade 11 St. Peter student.

Schoolmate Katy Windsor echoed those sentiments.

“It is amazing to see how strong her family was and how strong she was to do that for two years,”

Peterborough students Audrey Blasorah, Jessica Nilson, Katy Windsor and Zechariah Dunn stand outside the Anne Frank House Museum in Amsterdam on Thursday.

It really did touch me personally. I don’t know if I’d be able to do that, ever,” she said. “It makes you reflect. I have a really good life. I shouldn’t take anything for granted. Things can be taken away from you very easily.”

Earlier in the day, students toured the Dutch Resistance Museum, which highlighted the difficult choices facing every day Dutch people living through five years of German occupation in the Second World War – adjust, collaborate or resist.

Fortunately, many did resist. The museum underscores the many ways in which the people of Amsterdam helped their Jewish neighbours, forged documents, operated illegal newspapers and undermined the Nazi war machine.

“It was definitely illuminating how many people were affected by this war and just how young those people were,” St. Peter Grade 12 student Scott LaMoire said. “It goes to show that hate and intolerance are two of the biggest plagues in this world.”

It’s only Day 2 of this trip, and already it appears students are taking away lessons they will remember for a lifetime.

“We all need to be aware about how much we really have because we really take for granted what we have, like our freedom,” said Grade 11 Holy Cross student Zechariah Dunn. “Especially with being accepting of other people, we have to make sure we’re not discriminative or else things like this can happen.”

Stay tuned. The students have more lessons ahead as they dive deep into the history of the First and Second World Wars. Up next, we’re onto the sights of Ypres, Belgium – where the poppies blow.

NOTE: Follow the trip on Twitter @legalgeagle.

Galen Eagle is the communications manager of the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board. He is accompanying more than 50 students from St. Peter and Holy Cross secondary schools on an educational trip to Vimy Ridge in France.
April 10, 2017

Pride Swells at France memorial

Link to column: https://goo.gl/1iNyGM

Summary: This column is focused on the highlight of the trip – the Vimy 100 commemoration in France – and was featured on the front page of the Examiner.
April 11, 2017
Student Visit Juno Beach
Link to column: https://goo.gl/2BQUEX

Summary: This is the final column focusing on the experiences of Juno Beach and wrapping up the trip.
Other media stories:
http://www.northumberlandtoday.com/2017/04/02/st-mary-students-going-to-vimy-ridge

Twitter:
While accompanying two high schools in Europe, the PVNC Communications Manager Tweeted regularly so that followers back home could track the students’ experiences in real time. The link below shows a collection of the Tweets:
https://storify.com/PVNCCDSB/vimy100

Facebook:
To get a greater value and reach a larger audience, Communication Services repackaged media stories as Facebook ads.

Here is an example:
https://www.facebook.com/PVNCCDSB/posts/1728565143837150

Vimy 100 Presentation:
This engaging presentation was given to the PVNC Board of Trustees and later used to promote the PVNC Vimy 100 experiences with Members of Provincial Parliament in Toronto.

Link: https://spark.adobe.com/page/6MeEVYyxasHye/