

# Mariangela Rondinelli

Mariangela Rondinelli helps keep the legacy of Canadian service and sacrifice alive through Wartime Friends, an organization that fosters acts of remembrance rooted in the Second World War. She also encourages interactions between the people of the Province of Ravenna, Italy and the soldiers that fought there. She was honoured by the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette, for her incredible work and dedication.



**R**ondinelli hails from the town of Bagnacavallo (in Ravenna), an area that saw fierce fighting by Canadian divisions from the British Eighth Army from December 1944 to April 1945. Because there is such a clear connection between Canadian Veterans and Rondinelli's home town, she has made it a priority to ensure Canadian efforts during the Second World War are remembered.

Wartime Friends works to keep the memory of Italian Campaign Veterans alive through a variety of initiatives, most notably the “History-Memory” project. The project works with local school children and links the students with individual soldiers who died fighting to liberate the Bagnacavallo community. And it’s much more than reading a book or watching a historical documentary. “One of the reasons we started the History-Memory project was to help keep the memories of the soldiers alive in the minds of our school children, as opposed to just letting them read about it in history books.” The school children visit a local war cemetery (such as the Ravenna War Cemetery) and afterwards produce a unique, creative work which honours a soldier of their choice.

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Examples of the creative projects include poems, drawings, or even a letter based on a Canadian soldier. For Rondinelli, this is one of the most fulfilling parts of her work: “We believe that we have a duty to repay the help our community received in the last years of the war, and hope through this program that these students will forever keep the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers alive in the memory of Ravenna’s children.” A number of these children were able to meet with Canadian Veterans during a Government of Canada delegation trip to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Campaign in November 2019. A special few were selected to read poems at the ceremony which took place in Ravenna in the presence of the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette, and the Canadian Veterans.

It’s moments like these that highlight the work done by Wartime Friends. Following the events commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Campaign, Mariangela found time for a moment of reflection: “When the students meet the Canadian Veterans, I’m always so touched by what we have done – but also proud. The kids really do enjoy meeting the Veterans, and it’s something that will remain in their minds and hearts forever – a part of living history, if you will. The sparkle in the Veterans’ eyes made them look like the young soldiers they were 75 years ago. It was a joy to be a part of it all!”

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Mariangela Rondinelli and Wartime Friends have supported numerous visits to local burial sites over the years. This includes the Villanova Canadian War Cemetery, which holds the remains of 206 of Canada’s soldiers. “Every year, we have many visitors, organized tours, and families of the fallen that visit these cemeteries. Our group will often try and assist with these visits in any capacity, as we see this as our duty – to help the Canadians, much like they helped us 75 years ago.”

Rondinelli's work to commemorate Canada's Veterans does not go unnoticed. On 4 December 2019, she was presented with the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. The medal recognizes the exceptional volunteer achievements of individuals in a wide range of fields and pays tribute to the dedication and commitment of these volunteers.

The medal was presented by the Governor General of Canada, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Julie Payette. Receiving the medal from the Governor General is an experience Rondinelli will never forget: "I was honoured to receive the medal from the Governor General and it was a privilege to share the moment with wonderful friends and family who have helped me throughout this journey. It felt like a dream – so incredible. It took me a few days to be fully aware of what had happened." The medal, which is manufactured by the Royal Canadian Mint, is a symbol of care and generosity, represented by two interlaced hearts.

Through her work with Wartime Friends, Mariangela Rondinelli continually portrays the ideals of the medal: through care, generosity, and love.

In honour of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Italian Campaign, Mariangela Rondinelli is one of our Faces of Freedom. She continually works to preserve the memory of Canadian soldiers who participated in the Allied efforts during the Italian Campaign.