



## 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Ontario Group Convention

By Norm Marion, 441 (Huron) Wing



Opening ceremony of the 68<sup>th</sup> Annual Ontario Group Convention with the Ontario Group Executive. Members of Royal Canadian Air Cadet 659 Brock Squadron provided the Colour Party for opening and closing ceremonies (Photo by Brenda Wilson, 429 Georgina Wing)

BARRIE, Ontario - Between May 19 and 21, 2017, members of the Ontario Group of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association (RCAFA) gathered at the Best Western hotel in Orillia to attend the 68<sup>th</sup> Ontario Group Convention. Hosted by two local wings, 441 (Huron) Wing of Barrie, and 429 Georgina Wing, the event brought in more than 50 RCAFA delegates representing 19 wings from across Ontario.

*"I think it was very well done,"* says John Hooper, Ontario Group President, referring to the overall event. *"Everybody seemed to enjoy it. The collaboration between those two wings has been fantastic, and they've been wonderful hosts to their guests."*

The convention opened on the Friday evening with a formal ceremony where Colonel Andrew Fleming, Commander of 16 Wing Borden, was the guest speaker. In a brief address he reminded the audience of the responsibilities and roles of the RCAF: *"We enable the Government to reach far and fast, thereby helping to fulfill Canada's international obligations to foster peace, security and stability,"* he said.

Colonel Fleming provided examples of how the Air Force has adapted to change through recent fleet acquisitions and personnel regeneration programs, and he emphasized the importance of the role played by organizations like he RCAFA in its successes: *"The RCAF cannot succeed without the support and cooperation of stakeholders. This is an important element of Air Power. We must fly in formation with partners in government, industry, education and society. It is one of the reasons your [RCAFA] work is so important to the RCAF."* The 16 Wing Commander concluded by highlighting Canada's rich military aviation heritage, which began 100 years ago at Camp Borden and other Royal Flying Corps Canada stations in south-central Ontario, and invited the guests to join in with the celebrations of the milestone anniversary in June at CFB Borden.

Business sessions took place over two days with reports from Executive and Regional Vice Presidents, elections for Group Executive positions, and presentations on topics such as the RCAF Trust Fund and the Air Cadet Flying Program. A good portion of the time was spent on both formal and informal discussions on topics ranging from membership and recruitment to the value of "virtual wings."



Ontario Group President John Hooper was re-elected at his position during the convention (Photo by Brenda Wilson, 429 Georgina Wing)

*"It's very important that we have this face-to-face time whenever we can,"* says President Hooper. *"When you send someone a suggestion by email, the point doesn't always get across. But in face-to-face discussions like we're having here, all the nuances come through. Members appreciate getting this opportunity to express their views directly and discuss their concepts."*

The Saturday evening Awards Dinner featured a great presentation by award-winning journalist and author Ted Barris, who shared his views on the role of Canadian airmen in the now famous Great Escape. An enthusiastic and entertaining story teller, Barris captivated his audience with his description of how the 1963 film featuring Steve McQueen brought to the general public the incredible and dramatic story of the escapees from Stalag Luft III, while at the same time americanizing the key players, many of whom were in fact Canadians. A wonderful evening enjoyed by all.



Organizing Committee co-chairs, Ted Russell of 429 Georgina Wing (left) and Bob Coxon of 441 (Huron) Wing welcome the guests (Photo by Brenda Wilson, 429 Georgina Wing)

Commenting on the success of the weekend event, John Hooper, freshly re-elected in his role as Ontario Group President, suggested that this model of two wings joining forces to share the work in hosting an event like this could be repeated, especially with some of the smaller wings: *" I believe it's the first time that it's been tried, at least since I've been a member, and it worked beautifully."*

The list of people that deserve recognition for the success of the event would be too long to include here, but at least Ted Russel of 429 Georgina Wing, and Bob Coxon of 441 (Huron) Wing, deserve a mention for their role as co-chairpersons, representing their respective wing on the organizing committee. Well done!



Cécile Thompson, President of 444 Scarborough Wing, addresses questions to the Executive during a business session (Photo by Brenda Wilson, 429 Georgina Wing)