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Savy's Walk creates strong foundation for young pilot's legacy

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More than 350 people came out to Lambert Willson Park on Sunday, July 5, to take part in Savy's 5K Memorial Walk – but it was much more than a walk; it was a chance to build the foundation of a lasting community legacy built in honour of Savanna May Royes.

The Memorial Walk honoured the memory of 20-year-old Aurora resident Royes, an aspiring pilot who lost her life in a 2025 midair accident while training for her pilot's license in Manitoba.

This month's event raised more than \$22,000 to further the Savanna May Royes Aviation Safety Grant, established by the Royes family in their daughter's memory this past February to help "empower young, minority, female pilots" through the Urban Pilots Network.

"We were prepared for a big crowd, but the extent of seeing everybody, the community, it just blew us away. It was so emotional because Savy was very special to so many people. She really left an imprint on people's hearts," says Lorraine Royes, Savy's mother.

The event was not just a walk – it was a gathering of community and a chance for participants to take in what they call "Savy's Spot," a particularly picturesque oasis in the Aurora Community Arboretum at which they have placed a memorial bench in her name – a spot that has become a destination for all those who knew and loved Savanna.

The funds raised through Savy's 5K Memorial Walk, coupled with money brought in during a GoFundMe campaign to raise the initial money to establish the grant, has not only secured the grant program for an estimated 10 years into the future, it has also allowed them to consider starting a foundation of their own in their daughter's name to ensure Savy's legacy goes even further.

"I think anything we do in her honour would be great, I think she'd be very happy," says sister Breanna, noting her late sibling had a particular affinity for helping empower Black women.

Savy's interest in and passion for flying is something that came honestly to her.

Her father, Tim, a helicopter pilot himself, recalls taking his kids up for flights – and notes that Savy was the one child that especially took to it, getting a feel for the skies through Microsoft Flight Simulator before deciding to soar to the next level.

"On Father's Day 2023 she announced to us that she wasn't going to university; I figured she wanted a year off, but she said, no, she wanted to fly. That was a bit of a surprise to us," says Tim. "At no point did I discourage her, but at no point did I push her into it. I let her know that it might seem glamorous, but it's hard work."

"I'm coming to the end of my career and she would be taking over. I said to her that I was handing the baton over to her because she would have been the fifth member of our family – cousins, my elder brother – the fifth member would have been a commercial pilot, and the only woman – we're very proud of her for that."

Savy also took pride in funding her flight journey herself.

"She saved over \$20,000 working at The Keg and Sunset Grill because she wanted to pay for her initial licence," says Lorraine. "I think she wanted to do it just because if it didn't work out... she didn't want to waste [our] money."

Adds Tim: "She studied very hard, she worked very hard, too. She had just about accomplished her private pilot's license and she paid for all that part of it and her parents were going to pay for her commercial training. She was exceptional that by 17 hours [training] she was allowed to solo flight. We brought back books that she made notes in and I'm just amazed at the notes she had and what she had to cover. She worked very hard in a field that was relatively new to her."

The family's pride in Savy's accomplishments and the legacy they have been able to establish in her name is clear, and this pride is reflected in the community.

When she lost her life last year's tragic accident, more than 800 people attended her funeral, a true cross-section of the many people she touched during her short life.

The turnout at the July 5 walk is another testament to the impact she had during her time on this earth.

The second-annual Walk is set for July 11, 2027 – again, at Lambert Willson Park.

By Brock Weir
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