

CALGARY SUN **NEWS** TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2009



Michael Platt

n ex-soldier took issue with a tattered flag flying above a city high school and was told nothing could be done about it

They finally hauled it down yesterday afternoon, the threadbare, tattered shame of Calgary's public school system.

But out of sight doesn't mean out of mind, and the question remains.

Why was the Maple Leaf over Ernest Manning high school allowed to deteriorate into a pitiful scrap, fluttering for two years as an emblem of neglect?

"The flag is down right now — the flag is going to be replaced tomorrow," said Ted Flitton, spokesman for the Calgary Board of Education.

Thus, decisive action, following an inexplicable stretch of disregard — a spell of apathy so long that the flag was barely recognizable.

Indeed, Canada's glory was literally hanging by a thread when last seen above southwest Calgary yesterday.

Such is the power wielded by a highly-peeved member of the public; in this case, an ex-soldier named Paul Hughes, who served four years with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Hughes drives by Ernest Manning high every day, and for the past few months he's become increasingly annoyed by the horrendous flag flying atop the school's main staff.

"I think it's obscene — it's a slap in the face to everybody, and it's maybe the worst flag

I've ever seen," said Hughes.

"You might as well put a dish rag up there."

And so he did what any outraged citizen should — he called the school, trying to get the eyesore removed.

Instead of action, Hughes got excuses.

"The receptionist told me, we've been trying to get someone to change it for two years, and the principal said, that's right, two years, but we can't do it," he said.

"To me it's ludicrous. How do you look at our national flag for two years, and not do something about it — those children are our future leaders, and this is the standard we set for them?"

Hughes volunteered to buy the school a flag, and to remove the old

one with help of some old army buddies.

When that didn't work, he called the *Sun*.

And Ernest Manning suddenly found a way to remove the flag.

"The pulley was stuck and it couldn't be raised or lowered, though they tried several times," said Flitton, speaking for the school board after officials at Ernest Manning declined to comment.

Nothing like public scrutiny to grease the wheels of a wedged pulley. And so, a new flag rises, and the sun sets on the controversy.

Not so fast, school board.

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DARREN MAKOWICHUK/SUNMEDIA

Former soldier Paul Hughes was angered at the state of a flag flying above Ernest Manning high school. He called the school, and was told nothing could be done about the flag.

While the students of Manning might stare in wonder at their spanking new flag, there'll be no such luck for pupils across the city.

An informal scouting mission conducted by the *Sun* shows that while Manning's mangled flag was an excep-

tional example of Maple Leaf abuse, it is by no means the only school with a tattered ensign up its staff.

Just a few blocks away, a junior high flies one frayed by wind, and it's not alone.

At public schools across Calgary, there's clearly no

standard for replacing old flags, and many schools display Maple Leafs which are well past their best.

Instead of showing students a proud symbol of Canada, the Calgary Board of Education allows schools to fly flags which are faded and ripped.

It's a disgrace, but there's no rule forcing schools to follow the standard set by Heritage Canada: "When a flag becomes tattered and is no longer in a suitable condition for use, it should be destroyed in a dignified way by burning it privately."

Flitton confirms schools have no incentive to replace ragged standards.

"I don't think the policy covers that — it'd be the principal's decision," he said.

With budgets barely covering the cost of books, it's no surprise that Canada's symbol gets the shaft.

Principals can hardly be blamed for putting education before the national ensign.

But the school board has a responsibility to the children it educates — and that should include teaching them to honour their country.

Make a rule about disposing of old flags, supply them to schools as needed, and never again allow a rag like Ernest Manning's to sully this city's skyline.

There's a fourth 'R' which the Calgary Board of Education must embrace, along with the traditional triad of reading, writing and arithmetic.

It's called respect.