

# Brampton mayor's fundraisers only returned 25 per cent to the community

Brampton Mayor Susan Fennell's private fundraising events have brought in more than \$1.7 million over the past two years, but only 25 per cent of that has gone to the community groups they support.

The amounts were revealed in newly released financial statements last week by Stepping Out For Brampton Inc., the non-profit organization created in 2011 to run Fennell's lavish annual private gala and her golf tournament, which are promoted as fundraisers for local community groups.

"That's just wrong," said Danny DelMedico, owner of a Brampton real estate business, who paid \$1,000 for two tickets to attend Fennell's gala in 2008, but didn't know how little was disbursed. "That's all bells and whistles, lavish entertainment. That's wrong to give only 25 per cent to community groups."

By comparison, United Way Canada, according to its website, gives 85 cents of every dollar it raises directly back to hundreds of community groups that it supports.

DelMedico said he has not supported Fennell's private events in recent years.

Fennell's events (her gala began in 2005 and the golf tournament a few years before that) are not registered charities, and therefore are not allowed to issue charitable receipts.

Some of the tickets were bought by developers, company representatives, the City of Brampton, Peel police, Peel police board and the Region of Peel.

The number of city staff who attended the event still angers DelMedico.

"To see all the people who work for the city at this expensive gala — there were dozens of them. Who paid for them? I'll tell you: Taxpayers. I paid for them."

In 2012, more than \$63,000 was spent by the City of Brampton, the Region of Peel and the Peel Police Services Board, of which Fennell is the vice-chair, to purchase tickets for her events.

Fennell did not respond to questions about the sum of money disbursed by her events.

The financial statements show that in 2012 and 2013 combined, \$1,710,106

was raised and \$442,005 was distributed to community groups. Almost \$18,000 went to Fennell's own private booster group, Mayor Susan Fennell's Community Spirit Team, which is administered by the same board that decides which groups receive funding.

The gala board came under fire in 2010 for failing to produce financial statements. Statements from 2008 to 2013 have since been released, but there are none for 2005, 2006 or 2007. Incomplete bookkeeping has been blamed.

While 25 per cent of the overall money raised in 2012 and 2013 went to community groups, about 63 per cent, or \$1,077,323, went toward the cost of staging the annual gala and golf tournament. Twelve per cent of money raised went to administrative costs or was left unspent. The event planner contracted to stage the events was Meri-Mac, owned by local businessman Malcolm Scott Ching.

Brampton developer John Cutruzzola stopped donating in 2010, but in one year prior to that gave the gala a \$25,000 sponsorship.

"As we know now, probably only three or four thousand (of the \$25,000) went to the community," Cutruzzola said.

"We didn't know at the time, because there were no financial statements. We thought most of it was going for a good cause."

Cutruzzola is currently engaged in a lawsuit against the city after his company's proposal for a downtown redevelopment was disqualified. The lawsuit is still making its way through the courts.

Cutruzzola also said he stopped donating to Fennell's events because he felt pressure from the mayor to contribute.

"You were put on the spot. That's the impression people had. If the mayor called for money, what could you do?"

Fennell has denied asking for anything more than the cost of dinner tickets, but one email (one of a batch of mayor's office communications obtained by the Star under a freedom of information request) shows that the mayor asked for commitments to donate as much as \$100,000.

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