

# Snowarama means commitment

Feb 1989

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Sun Times staff

WIARTON — Twenty-four years ago, Tom Norris was a cabbie driving crippled children to summer camp. Wendell Thomson was one of those children.

Now Norris is a regional director of the Ontario Easter Seals Society. For 14 years, he's been the mainstay of Snowarama-Skiarama, one of the group's most successful single-day fundraising events.

And Thomson is one of the event's most devoted supporters.

Snowarama-Skiarama here Saturday attracted 112 snowmobilers and 296 cross-country skiers. They brought in pledges from people all over Grey and Bruce counties of just under \$72,000.

The donations varied from person to person. Tanya Atchison, 9, of Shallow Lake kicked in \$40. And she was among 68 students from Amabel-Hepworth elementary school who collected \$5,686.71 in pledges.

Thomson, now 33, brought in \$6,000 single-handedly.

"They always helped me when I was small," said Thomson, who was born with a twisted right arm and leg. "And I thought 'how can I help them back?'"

"I can't give it up," he said. "Cause I always like helping people any way I can."

The commitment to helping others began for Thomson in Norris's cab on the way to a two-week summer camp sponsored by the group then known as the Society for Crippled Children.

Norris's commitment had similar beginnings.

Norris, who now operates a large school bus service, was waiting for a fare at a special Toronto clinic when he saw a young girl with thalidomide-shortened limbs take her first steps in a set of new fibreglass legs.

"I saw her take her first steps. And she was so happy and the mother was so happy, I thought 'There's something to this.'"

That was in 1962. He joined the Rotary Club, which helps raise funds for the Easter Seals Society. He's been a director of the society for 23 years. And in 1974, he started Snowarama.

In 14 years of operation, the event has now raised almost \$700,000. It's so successful, the Easter Seals Society is using it as a model for similar events in other parts of the province.

Society public relations officer Fiona Brown and a photographer covered Saturday's activities searching out material for a slide show and instruction program.

"So far there are 34 Snowaramas," Brown said in an interview. "We'd like there to be more and we'd like them all to be as well organized as this one."

Brown's task may not be easy. Norris figures the success of Snowarama-Skiarama has a lot



Sun Times photo by Willy Waterton

## Wendell Thomson poses beside his snowmobile Saturday

to do with the location.

"It's because of the people," he said. "Per capita, we've always raised more money. It's people and caring for other people. That happens up here."

Wendell Thomson agrees. He lives in a trailer on his parents' farm near Limberlost, just north of Mar.

He works in the bush skinning cedar poles for contractor Milt Hayes. And he figures the Bruce Peninsula is just about the best place in the world to live.

January is usually a slow month in the lumber business. And for the past four years, he has set aside the month for raising money.

He takes in most public events, Wiarton's Groundhog Festival, hockey tournaments at area arenas. And he gets on his snowmobile and drives door-to-

door on the peninsula asking for pledges.

"I start at Miller Lake and work my way right through to Wiarton," he said. The response is great.

"If they don't pledge me the first time, I just go back and try 'er again. You never give up," Thomson said.

Thomson's \$6,014 total was the largest single total for anyone on a snowmobile. Owen Sound skier Bill Georgas raised \$10,090 and was the biggest individual fund raiser.

Wiarton Public School placed second to Amabel-Hepworth in the school challenge this year with 24 participants and a total of \$2,116.9 in pledges. Owen Sound's West Hill Secondary School was third with 10 participants and \$1,704.52 in pledges.

In all, students from 19 schools raised \$14,216.99 in pledges.



Sun Times photo

Tom Norris

... event organizer

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