

*Running up the 'tab'*

# Collectors making a difference

As of March 1994, over 130-140 million pop can tabs were collected and resulted in the purchase of 42 wheelchairs, while many second-hand wheelchairs and some electric wheelchairs were being reconditioned, and one electric hospital bed purchased.

Quite an achievement for a program originally starting as a hoax.

But initially it was a hoax that began four or five years ago. No one knows how or where it started but thousands of people were taken in. When the time came to turn tabs in and make things happen, no one knew where to send them or who to call.

That's when Jack Baumber and Ray Pearse, employees of the Elora Royal Canadian Legion got into the act and decided to somehow make the hoax a reality.

"Everyone was talking about it; it was even in the papers at the time," said Baumber about the original hoax. "We thought it was real. We thought we'd be supplying wheelchairs."

Needless to say, there was no place for the tabs to go. "They were all in my barn," said Baumber. "Rather than dump them we decided to see if a metal scrap yard in Guelph would take them."

The rest is history.

The first real-life wheelchair was provided in 1989, thanks to Baumber, Pearse and people who collected pop can tabs.

Shortly after this a local organization, the Korean War Veterans of Canada, decided to lend a hand and they've been doing it ever since. At first there was just a trickle of tabs coming in but as

word spread, more and more tabs became a stream; the Korea Vets now want it to be a literal river of tabs and are calling on all people in the area to get on the bandwagon. They are the official representative of Baumber and Pearse in the area and are anxious to be the strongest supporter.

Their aim is to set up collection centers where pop can tabs can be dropped off for pick up by their people.

"We'd like to see major stores,

them with a means to leave a prison-home to venture into the outside world and become a part of society once more. It gives some of them a sense of that elusive, though partial, independence which they've never known."

The money obtained from the sale of pop can tabs goes directly towards the purchase of wheelchairs. There is no middleman. Every cent collected goes to the project, no one gets a cent out of this - it's a labor of love.

The Korea Veterans got involved when Bruce, the handicapped son of one of its member, Alan Alexander of Erin, began collecting tabs for a deaf girl who was collecting them in her church. One day Bruce went to a Korea Veterans meeting with his father, Alan, and that was the beginning of a joyful association of the Korea Veterans and the Elora Legion. They are now one of the staunchest supporters of this pop can tab campaign and they're making every effort to make it snowball.

"We'd like to see every business, institution, industry, school and individual take part. It's terrific when you realize you're doing something so valuable for someone who is so in need, and it hardly takes an effort on your part. I don't know what to say...I guess it's the excitement of being part of something worthwhile."

Locally, until they can establish central pick up points - you can call on Alan Alexander at 833-2836 in the Brampton and Erin area or Doug Bryan at 278-0792 in the Mississauga area. They'll be more happy to do it.



Collecting pop tabs has helped supply wheelchairs for those in need. So far, 42 wheelchairs have been purchased.

such as supermarkets, become involved; schools would make ideal collection centres and the cafeterias of major manufacturers and industries would also be an asset," says the Public Relations officer of Korea Vets Unit 13 locally. "We're not excluding individuals. Everyone can help. Churches, hospitals, convenience stores and myriad other stores could get into the act. There's no end to the possibilities. The main thing to remember is the fact no matter how few tabs are collected, or how many, they all add up to wheelchairs - conveyances that make life for the disabled much more comfortable and provide

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