

Community Profile

Colours of cancer

Local woman turns hobby into fundraiser for cancer patients

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Carlene Frimer wanted to make a difference.

In mid-December, she began assembling a small number of colourful bracelets, with the idea of selling them to friends and family and raising money for a good cause.

Seven months and 1,119 bracelets later, Frimer has turned a part-time hobby into a major fundraising campaign for cancer.

On July 18, she donated \$5,000 to the Windsor-Essex Cancer Centre Foundation at Windsor Regional Hospital.

Another \$7,500 went towards the Dragon Boat Race fundraiser for breast cancer that took place July 16 in Windsor.

"It's been all-consuming for the past six months," Frimer said.

Selling each bracelet for \$30, she has raised a total of \$14,000.

Frimer began her campaign by spending a few hours each night assembling the Swarovski crystal bracelets at her home in Tecumseh.

She first got the idea when a co-worker at the Woodslee Credit Union in Essex came into work one day wearing a bracelet she brought back from Florida, purchased with funds that went towards cancer research.

"We thought about calling this woman who made it in Florida and having her send us

some," said Frimer who has worked at the credit union for the past four years. "Then I just thought of making a similar bracelet here and have all the funds go locally."

The venture began with 46 orders from staff and family before Christmas.

When the new year began, Frimer thought she'd continue making the Colours of Cancer bracelets in case anybody else wanted one.

Since then, as word of mouth began to spread and the popularity of the bracelets grew, keeping up with the demand has been nearly a full-time job for Frimer.

"It's been non-stop," she said. "We've never had a bunch sitting here waiting to sell, we were always struggling to keep up as the orders were coming in."

Frimer began receiving 20 to 30 e-mails per day from people asking for the bracelets. She then enlisted the help of her co-workers to help fill the orders. The five-person staff started assembling the bracelets during their lunch hour.

Liz Arkinstall, manager of community relations at Woodslee Credit Union, remembers turning the workplace's boardroom into the campaign's bracelet-making headquarters.

"It's an awesome initiative," Arkinstall said. "It's amazing that, by

word of mouth, they have been selling so well. It shows how many people are touched by cancer."

Every bracelet is decorated with 15 different coloured crystals, each representing a type of cancer.

It's because a wide range of cancers are recognized in the bracelet that more people have been able to relate to the cause and feel more of a personal connection with it, Frimer said.

"I don't think there's anybody we know that hasn't been affected by cancer in some way," she said.

Twenty-one years ago, Frimer's father died of lung cancer. Since then, it's been a cause close to her heart, she added.

Norma Brockenshire, president of the Cancer Centre Foundation, said the donated funds will be used to purchase new equipment for the comfort and needs of cancer patients in the hospital.

"It will certainly go toward something important," Brockenshire said. "All the money will stay in Windsor and Essex County, that's the main thing."

Frimer said after taking a short break from bracelet making, she will resume the campaign in the next few months.

To purchase a bracelet, or to help sell them, e-mail braceletsforcancer@woodslee.com.



Carlene Frimer displays a Colours of Cancer bracelet she assembled. Frimer, along with her friends and co-workers, has made more than 1,100 bracelets and raised a total of \$14,000. She recently donated \$5,000 to Windsor Regional Hospital's Cancer Centre Foundation and \$7,500 to the Dragon Boat Race fundraiser for breast cancer research.



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