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Hats off to fundraisers

If charities could mobilize a community and raise money as quickly and efficiently as the Markham Stouffville Hospital has, they probably wouldn't have to fundraise for years.

Six years ago the challenge facing the organizing group seemed enormous. But it was simple. If they raised \$5 million the community got a hospital. If they didn't another community might get one first.

Somehow they had to squeeze \$5 million from a limited resource base - two small-town communities of about (25,000) total.

All levels of government seemed ready to give the community a \$75 million hospital. The provincial government and the region of York would pay a percentage. It was now up to area businesses and residents to dig deep and do its share.

Little time was wasted. Volunteers rallied and divided the community into target groups - corporations, small businesses, service clubs and organizations, and residential.

Every door was knocked on and, for a time, proceeds from almost every community event were going to the hospital. Garage sales, pig roasts, ball tournaments, raffles and even kids Kool-Aid stands carried the familiar MSH symbol.

"It was unbelievable," says Glenn Crosby, who has sat on the MSH board for seven years. "This isn't just a bedroom community for Toronto, there is a deep sense of community here. People want to help out."

In part, Crosby's 'deep sense of community' stems from the area's longstanding farming community. Although exact figures aren't known, they were generous to the project.

"They were all willing to help. Some even

became lifetime members (donating more than \$100" says Barry Little, a farmer and one of the people in charge of collecting from the agricultural sector.

The farmers "tend always to help the community," says Little. Many of the older families supported the Scarborough hospitals when they were built years ago and pleasantly aided the MSH.

Good supporters of community facilities have always been the service clubs. And when the MSH was proposed they were there to lend a helping hand. Some of the major contributors over the years have been the Rotary Clubs, the Lions, the Kiwanians, and the Kinsmen.

Since 1983, the Markham Lions Club donated almost \$70,000 to the hospital - one of the largest donations from any service club. President Mike Moyer says they wouldn't have been able to do it without the generous residents.

"We've always been blessed with strong community support here. It's excellent," he says.

In an incredible 18 months the volunteers had the entire sum committed - on paper at least.

"It was the most successful campaign in the province," says Crosby. "I think we were the only hospital with the money already in the bank before the construction started."

Over the years, that pledged money - which in some cases was to be collected in installments - was all gathered and banked.

In short, no other community beat Markham and Stouffville in the effort to win the region's third full-service hospital. Residents proved they would not only open their hearts and community but their wallets too.

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