

# Easter Seals benefit with help of local man

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Correspondent

It would be hard to imagine anyone better suited to the position of director of fundraising for Easter Seals than Ed Hakonson, the Society's Timmy in 1959 and an ardent supporter of their continuing work with physically disabled children. Born in 1949 and brought up

## Fundraising goals and projects help keep Society on leading edge of care

in the Stouffville area, Mr. Hakonson contracted polio when he was three months old.

Between the ages of nine and 14 he underwent 13 operations to enable him to function without a brace.

"My parents had their own business and weren't flush with money, so Easter Seals helped them cover the costs," he says.

**Expensive treatment**  
He estimates the cost of his treatment at about \$250,000. "It would be a little over \$1.2 million in today's dollars."

To understand how important the Society's work is, he says, "all you have to do is sit in a wheelchair and find your way around the community, and I

say that from experience, I have a 22-year-old brother who is in a wheelchair. He has spina bifida."

His own experience with the Society was instrumental in his decision to become involved as an adult.

"I always think that if you have the opportunity to progress and you've been given that break, you have to stand up and be counted; that's where my involvement started."

But perhaps the greatest influence on his decision was Whipper Billy Watson, the former world wrestling champion whose work with handicapped children made him a household name.

**Whipper Billy**  
Whipper Billy died last February, but his compassion left a lasting impression on Mr. Hakonson.

"He had a saying, 'follow your dream,'" he recalls. "It was simple, but it summed up what he stood for. He was a tremendous humanitarian."

**Leg injuries**  
Whipper Watson himself was run down by a drunken driver, an accident which resulted in severe leg injuries, but that didn't deter him from his cause.

As his commitment grew, he became a director of the Society.

Mr. Hakonson remembers being carried into a room at the Royal York Hotel by this gentle giant the year he was named Timmy.

Elected to the Society's board of directors in 1988, and recently named director of fundraising, Mr. Hakonson has devised an innovative program called Easterciser, based on exercises and working out, which will be launched this fall.

"Gyms and health clubs all over Ontario will compete against each other via the Cable Television Network," he explains.

**Television auction**  
Corporate sponsorships, pledges collected by members of competing clubs, and a television auction featuring health items donated by national sponsors through local outlets will all be part of the mix.

Easterciser will not only serve as an important fundraiser, but will also emphasize the importance and fun of participating in various forms of exercise.

The program is especially appropriate to the children it

benefits, he points out. "Physically disabled children can be involved as part of their therapy."

**\$10 million goal**  
His own task as a volunteer on the board of directors is to oversee the Society's full time employees whose function is to raise funds. "My group advises them on how to do it and directs them," Mr. Hakonson says.

Of Easterciser, which Mr. Hakonson hopes will raise close to \$10 million, he says, "I do the easy part; I just give them the parameters and the concepts and they have to do the rest."

Other Society fundraisers include Snowarama, introduced by Whipper Billy Watson, envelope stickers and the telethon.

With more than 7,000 handicapped youngsters seeking help, the Society's fund raising budget for the year is \$16,385 million.

The proceeds from the non-profit organization go towards a wide range of needs including hospital costs, rehabilitation, education and summer camps.

**Many programs**  
The Easter Seals Society also assists related programs, including downhill skiing and horseback riding for the disabled and the Cystic Fibrosis campaign.

On a community level, they get considerable support from service clubs including the Lions, the Kinsmen and the Rotary Clubs of various municipalities.

"Our local Legion has always been a very strong backer of Easter Seals and they really are a tremendous group of people," he stresses. "Helen Taylor and Norm Dunn have been great."

And if decisiveness, dedication and hard work count for anything, Ed Hakonson is surely the ideal person for the job he has been selected to do for the Easter Seals Society.

If you need assistance or advice, or would like to offer help to the ESS, call 421-8377.



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