

# Whitchurch Highlands students trade pop tabs for wheelchairs

**KATE GILDERDALE**  
Correspondent

"This is a school with a heart." So says Whitchurch Highlands' French teacher Joan Miyata, who is understandably proud of the support students, parents and staff have given to the school's pop can tab collection program. Tabs are collected at the school and sold to raise funds for wheelchairs for physically handicapped people across the province.

"The reason we got involved was that in the summer I bumped into a man named Dennis Patchell at Participation House and he asked

me if I would collect the tabs," explained Miyata, whose initial reaction to the suggestion was somewhat sceptical.

"I thought it was a scam from years ago, so I called several hospitals and organizations who put me on to Raymond Pearse." Pearse, a World War II veteran who is employed by the Elora Legion, got his collection program under way by approaching a scrap yard dealer, who agreed to buy the tabs.

He and a group of supporters formed the Wheelchair Club in 1989, assuming that it would take

two to two and a half years to raise sufficient money to buy just one wheelchair.

Since then, however, tabs collected and sold have enabled Pearse and his committee to purchase 13 wheelchairs. When Miyata discovered that the program was a legitimate undertaking, she approached Whitchurch Highlands' principal Sharon Sawkins with a view to getting the school involved.

"I presented the idea to her and she said, 'let's organize it here.' She was so supportive. We had four guests from Participation House come to meet the kids last fall, because we wanted to bridge the gap between physically capable and physically challenged people," Miyata said.

"Also, if we were going to get involved, we would like to help our community and build bonds in our community. The gym was set up

with our guests in each corner, so the kids could talk to them and ask them about themselves."

"At first," she said, "the students were somewhat reticent, but then they saw behind the wheelchairs. It was just outstanding."

Since then, tabs have been pouring in, and a collection of pails stands in the corridor, filled to the brim. "As soon as I get a large

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