

POLO FOR HEART

Putting heart and soul into Polo for Heart

Annual fundraising event owes success to volunteers

BY AMY WEST
Staff Writer

Polo may be the sport of kings but even royalty needs a helping hand.

For the past 22 years, an army of volunteers has given hundreds of hours to ensure the success of Polo for Heart.

And according to Rick Gallop, president and CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, volunteers are the driving force behind the annual event held at the Gormley Polo Centre.

"Polo for Heart is the only event put on by Heart and Stroke that is completely third-party driven," Gallop said. "In other words, the entire thing is run by volunteers without the usual staff component. It's a very black and white issue — no volunteers, no Polo for Heart."

Some volunteers work year-round on the planning side while others just come for the event itself — and they aren't just horse people.

Gallop remembers one year when the CEO of Noranda Mines, a Polo for Heart corporate sponsor, volunteered for garbage detail.

"There was this man, one of the top 10 CEOs in Canada at the time, running around the polo field with a green garbage bag proudly declaring he was in charge of garbage. Where else would you see something like that?"

"The people who volunteer are from all walks of life but they all share a common enthusiasm for the event."

Angelika Lawson has been with Polo for Heart for 15 years. She is in charge of decorations for the field as well as corporate tents and boutiques. After moving to Canada from her native Germany, Lawson decided to devote her time to charity work.

"The event appealed to me because it is a cause near and dear to my heart, but also because of the type of people who are involved," Lawson said. "They are very down to earth and not afraid to roll up their sleeves and get dirty."

Paul Chaply agreed.

The Aurora resident has produced the Polo for Heart magazine for the past six years. His wife, Karen, is co-chairperson of the event.

"These (volunteers) are all wonderful people who give

every year we pick up a few new faces."

One of the new faces on the Polo for Heart executive this year is Beth Egan. The Aurora resident is in charge of securing sponsors.

"My husband and I have been supporters for the past 10 years," Egan said. "We really believe in the cause."

Egan attributes the event's success to the fact it is a family affair.

Aside from the actual polo matches, there is a petting zoo for children, skydiving and kite demonstrations, performing dogs and a boutique section featuring everything from tack to jewelry.

All activities have been donated or sponsors have covered costs.

"It's a great way for people who wouldn't normally attend an equestrian event to get out of the city, pack a picnic and drive to the country for a day of fun," Egan said.

It is also a chance for people to see a live polo match, which isn't exactly a common outing for most families.

Teams from around the world will be competing against the hometown Toronto Polo Club in two matches a day.

A silent auction and raffle will round out the weekend.

"It really is a huge undertaking," Egan said.

"A real logistical accomplishment," added Gallop. "Not only are they co-ordinating a weekend full of activities, but you have to factor in teams coming overseas with four ponies per player. I don't know how they do it but we are so grateful to the volunteers for pulling this off."

Polo for Heart runs June 15, 16 and 17 at the Gormley Polo Centre on Leslie Street just south of Bloomington Road. General admission is \$10 and includes parking. Admission is free for children 12 and under.

Polo for Heart "rain days" have been scheduled for June 22, 23 and 24.

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JUNE 15, 16, 17, 2001

enormous amounts of their time to the event," Chaply said. "And they do it because they have a genuine love for it and a strong belief in the cause."

The cause, raising money for heart disease and stroke research, has been another success story. To date, more than \$3 million has been raised by Polo for Heart events.

All money goes to the Polo for Heart chair, which was established at the Centre of Excellence, University of Toronto. It supports the work of Dr. Peter Liu, a brilliant cardiac researcher who has been nominated for a Nobel prize.

But all this success doesn't come easy, volunteer co-ordinator Cecilia Scott-Fisher said. It takes the work of hundreds of volunteers just to be able to run the Polo for Heart weekend.

"As well as having an executive committee and people soliciting sponsors, it is absolutely essential that we have people to do the jobs on the day."

Getting enough volunteers is always an underlying concern, says Scott-Fisher, who, along with her daughter Louise, spends months co-ordinating and allocating duties.

"We have a lot of them who do it every year," she said. "But



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