

Volunteering comes from the heart

BY JOHN CUDMORE
Staff Writer

The coolest thing about volunteers is there are few restrictions.

That is, for anyone willing to help, someone will surely permit it to happen.

Take the Kool-Aid gang of five who, for the second consecutive year, will turn over funds from sales of their curbside stand to officials during this weekend's 25th Polo for Heart at the Gormley Polo Centre.

And then there is Fred Bullen, who for 23 of the 24 previous years of the event has supervised the feeding of the general public not equipped with picnic baskets or passes to the VIP areas.

Together, it all adds up to the notion that any age, shape or type is welcome when it comes to lending a hand.

In truth, that youthful gang is comprised of five pre-teen brothers, sisters and cousins from an Aurora neighbourhood who have designated proceeds from five days of sales to the polo event,



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Back again this year at their curbside stand on Steeplechase Avenue selling Kool-Aid to support Polo for Heart are (clockwise from bottom right) Virginia McGovern, 12, brother Alex, 7, Christina Cardella, 9, Elizabeth McGovern, 10, and John Cardella, 12.

third term. Meetings are held throughout the year for the event, which raises approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000 annually for heart and stroke research.

"My dad spent a lot of time with communities, spending time on outdoor rinks and that sort of thing, so maybe I got it from him," he says.

Initially, Polo for Heart was staged as a two-weekend event requiring more volunteers and more of their time.

Now, the matches are held over three days during a single weekend. It seems a more convenient arrangement.

For the youngsters, it seemed a good cause and a shift of gears.

"I think they just saw the posters at the mall advertising Polo for Heart and decided it was a good thing to do," said Jean Cardella, mother of John and Christina.

"They just decided on their own and didn't want any money for themselves."

"Christina and Virginia ride together and they both love horses and riding," she says.

And, perhaps, they're developing a love for volunteerism.



FRED BULLEN: Aurora Lions Club president has helped with polo event for 24 years.

which gallops to life June 25 to 27.

"We all started as a team and like helping people," says Elizabeth McGovern, 10, who, along with her sister Virginia, 12, and seven-year-old brother, Alex, presented \$90 to the heart and stroke research cause last year after selling Kool-Aid for 50 cents a glass. Prior to sales this weekend, the team, which also includes Christina and John Cardella, had already surpassed their 2003 total by raising \$110.38.

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"We'll donate all the money we make to Polo for Heart," chimed in John, who turns 13 this week.

Past ventures for the children include raising funds for programs related to guide dogs for the blind and humane societies.

While the children are getting their feet wet as fundraising volunteers, Mr. Bullen is a veteran, marking his 24th straight year as a volunteer with Polo for Heart.

The Schomberg resident saddled up with the Polo for Heart team early on at the request of the late Michael Sifton, Sr. and hasn't left.

"Maybe I don't know when to give up," says Mr. Bullen, 65, who became connected when the Aurora Lions Club took over the feeding needs of the general public. "But it's been a great cause and that's why I have stayed all these years."

The Polo for Heart event is a year-round cause for Mr. Bullen, a two-time Lions president who is about to begin a

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