

## 26th Anniversary Edition



# POLO

## for HEART

### From one generation to next, tradition of caring continues

BY SUZANNE WINTROB

Like all great things, Polo for Heart began with a vision.

Just more than a quarter century ago, a man named Colonel Michael Sifton saw an opportunity to bring two of his favourite things together: people and polo.

In addition to being a huge polo fan, having learned to play in 1958, Col. Sifton was also committed to charitable causes, particularly anything to do with heart-related research. His father had died of a stroke and so he saddled up his friends at the Toronto Polo Club and the Heart Action Committee and together they set in motion what became the very first Polo for Heart charity event. The first event was a resounding success involving an exuberant crowd of 600 people and raising \$25,000 for charity.

Fast forward 26 years and Polo for Heart is still going strong. In fact, it is now a truly international event, with players and horses hailing from Ireland, France, Mexico, Argentina and the United States. The annual event has raised more than \$3 million for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

When Col. Sifton died in 1995, his wife, Heather and their sons, Cliff, Michael and Derek, decided to continue his legacy. Today, they work closely with 100 dedicated volunteers and a group of partners including The Lions Club of Aurora Inc.

*'So long as there's research to be done ... Polo for Heart will continue ...'*

Thanks to their hard work, this year's Polo for Heart, June 24 to 26, will be the biggest ever, with more than 10,000 people from all over the world expected to converge on Gormley Polo Centre in Richmond Hill.

This year the spotlight is families, with lots of child-friendly activities including a children's village, skydiving, performing dogs, clowns and face painters, dressage demonstrations, and ample space to picnic. Plenty of boutiques will offer unique, one-of-a-kind merchandise from gifted craftspeople and artisans. Proceeds go toward research into child-related heart disease and education on healthy living.

"Our children are our future, and that's why we've shifted gears to focus on the next generation," says Cliff Sifton, who picked up his first polo mallet as a child and now heads up the Toronto Polo Club.

Consider the numbers. Eight out of every 1,000 babies born in Canada have a congenital heart defect. And by their first birthday, another 13 of every 1,000 children will be identified as having heart problems. While many of these defects require little or no treatment, some children aren't so lucky.

"So long as there's research to be done to help these children, Polo for Heart will continue taking to the field," says Sifton.

Polo for Heart 2005 will have two daily matches played Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Grandstand seating is provided facing the polo field. Game time each day is noon and 1:30 pm.

The Gormley Polo Centre is on Leslie Street just south of the Bloomington Side Road. General admission is \$10 (children aged 12 and under are free). Parking is free. Gates are open 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For further details, call the Polo for Heart Hotline at 416-432-9735 or visit [www.polo4heart.org](http://www.polo4heart.org).