

# Booming bracelets

Happy charities reap benefits as fundraising novelty becomes trendy

BY PATRICK MANGION  
Staff Writer

Whether it's a ribbon on your lapel, inspiring words inscribed on a bracelet or a thingamaboob for your keys, tapping into Canadians' altruistic side is no easy task.

But when a charitable organization gets it right, sales from a novelty product can be a boon to their good works.

These days, seven-time Tour de France-winning American cyclist Lance Armstrong may be just as well known as the innovator behind the wildly successful yellow Livestrong bracelets for cancer research.

Like scores of ribbons, pins and other collectibles preceding the rubber bracelet phenomena, other charities, organizations and businesses have lined up to hitch a ride on the coat tails of that success.

The Canadian Cancer Society began selling similar blue bands last June.

It's already sold more than 300,000 of them, said Paul Bauman, the organization's senior manager of fundraising.

And earlier this month, the char-

ity introduced its thingamaboob — a key chain with three plastic balls illustrating various tumour sizes.

Even through the society is committed to being non-profit, promotions aren't left to chance, Mr. Bauman said.

"We investigate, research and ensure (promotional products) will be productive ... the same as a private company would," he said.

With Statistics Canada reporting Canadians are giving more than ever, philanthropy has taken on more pecuniary overtones, said Larry Easto, best-selling business writer and marketing coach.

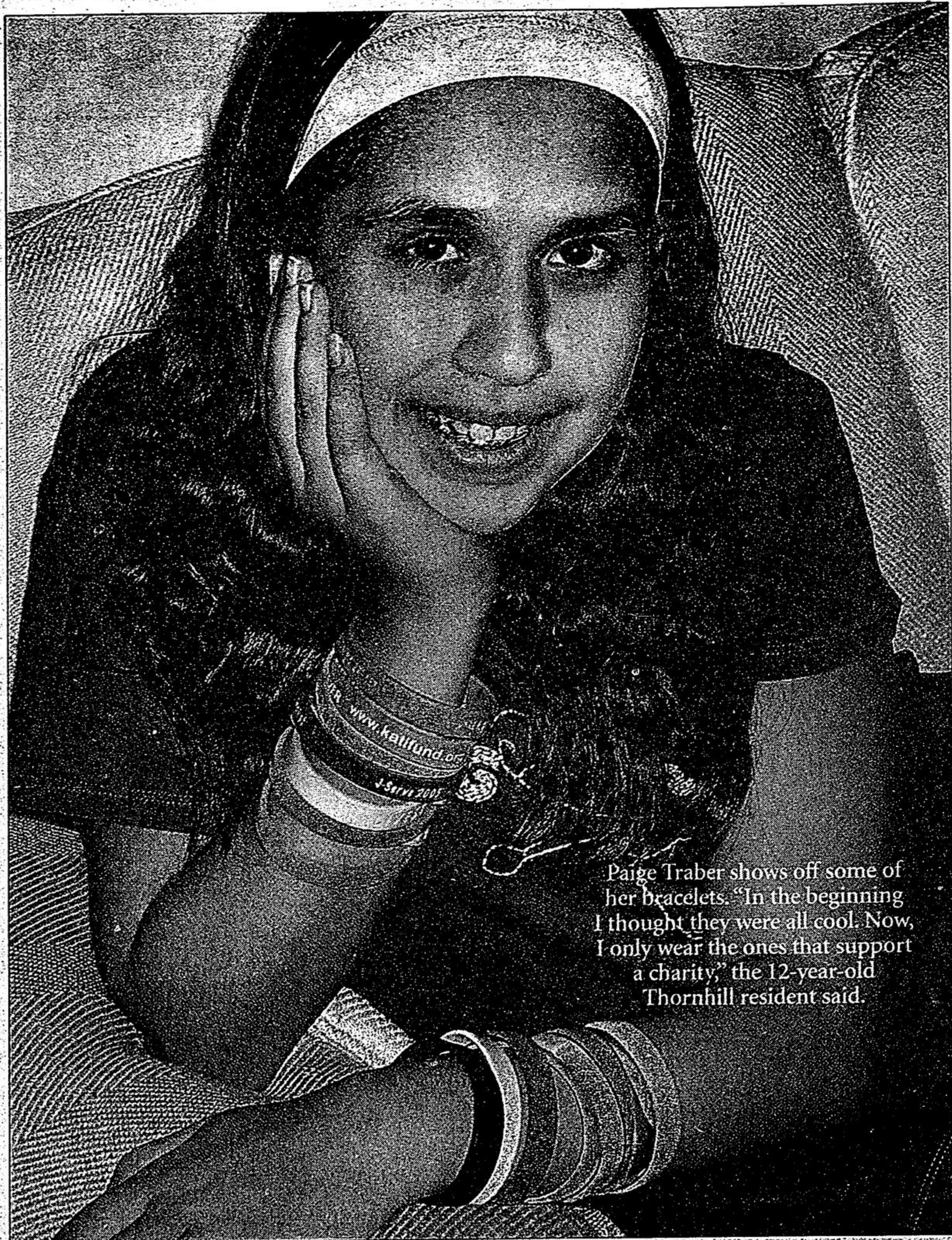
"Things have changed so much. Charities are competing for the hearts and minds of Canadians," Mr. Easto said.

To that end, branding has become paramount.

"Most of the time, charities get support from people doing the right thing. What charities are doing with bracelets is delivering something tangible. It's visible. People feel good and they can be connected with a popular cause," Mr. Easto said.

The result has been a marketplace flooded with a rainbow of coloured bracelets for an equally dizzying number of causes.

Twelve year old Paige Traber



Paige Traber shows off some of her bracelets. "In the beginning I thought they were all cool. Now, I only wear the ones that support a charity," the 12-year-old Thornhill resident said.

owns several dozen rubber bracelets.

"It's just a trend. It's a fashion thing," the Grade 7 Thornhill student explained.

She and her elementary school mates collect the bracelets, or "Live-

strongs", as they refer to them.

"In the beginning I thought they were all cool. Now, I only wear the ones that support a charity. The others have no point, no meaning," she said.

"I don't like going into stores that

sell the plastic fake ones. You can tell they aren't real. That really bugs me. They look like they support charity, but they don't. We don't buy those," she said.

But the widespread parody rolls off the shoulders of the originators, according to Stephanie Elsea, spokesperson for the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

"We recognize imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we don't waste time focusing on other wristbands. Our sole focus is to help people with cancer," said Ms Elsea.

"If wearing a Livestrong wristband inspires someone to think about what the words mean, to visit the (foundation) website or to start a conversation with cancer survivor, then the wristband did its job."

— Pat Mangion

## CHARITY BRACELET ORIGINATOR HAS SOLD 56 MILLION WORLDWIDE

When cancer survivor and world-class cyclist Lance Armstrong began the Livestrong campaign about 18 months ago, it was meant as a simple gesture.

At \$1 each, the yellow rubber bracelets were meant as a source of inspiration and support, with proceeds going to cancer research.

It seemed rather underwhelming, even idealistic, at the time.

But the response has been anything but

More than 56 million yellow bands have been sold worldwide.

Their popularity has elicited copy cats from other charities, sports teams and the business community.

While sticking with its traditional pink, U.S. breast cancer fundraising groups have embraced Livestrong-inspired bracelets.

An orange Live Safe version has been adopted by AIDS charities.

And not long after last year's devastating tsunami swept through south Asia, bracelets with the words We Care and Tsunami Relief were being scooped up by those wanting to make a difference.

And with World Series champions Chicago White Sox boasting black wrist bands with the word Believe, you can bet sports will be the next domain of rubber bracelets.

But they all have two things in common: words of inspiration and helping charity.

It explains why innovators at the Lance Armstrong Foundation ([www.laf.org](http://www.laf.org)) don't seem put out by competitors.

However, an Arizona mountain bike store raised the ire of some with its Live Wrong parody.

However, AZ Bike's website said its line of black merchandise simply sends a message for people to make their own choices in life.



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