

Wheelchairs give new look to Wheels in Motion relay

BY ALYSHIA HIGGINS

Whitchurch-Stouffville, it's time to put yourself in someone else's chair.

The annual Rick Hansen Wheels in Motion takes place June 8, with a new routine.

Instead of the 5-kilometre wheel, bike and run through the streets of Stouffville done in other years, this year's event is a wheelchair relay.

Participants get into teams of five and go through four challenges including weaving around pylons in a wheelchair, picking up sheets of laminated paper with oven mitts and wheeling around the track as a team, Stouffville event leader Martina Bartley said.

The approach is something the organization hopes to implement across the country.

Teams are asked to raise \$1,000 each, or \$200 per person, but Mrs. Bartley said if teams are a little short, they don't need to worry.

"We're encouraging people to do the best they can," she said.

"We're certainly not going to turn anyone away."

All legs of the relay will be timed and winners receive prizes including gift cards to the Home Depot and local restaurants.

Rick Hansen Wheels in Motion began six years ago and has raised money for spi-

nal cord research and local community initiatives. Since its inception, Canadians have collectively raised \$7.6 million.

Stouffville residents have participated in the event since 2004 and raised almost \$50,000, Mrs. Bartley said.

Some of the projects funded by the local monies raised have gone towards power doors and an elevated seating area at the Stouffville Arena, wheelchair accessible picnic tables in Memorial Park and an elevator and power doors at local churches.

Besides the change in the way the event is carried out, there's another bonus.

"In the past, 50 per cent of funds go back into the community," said Mrs. Bartley. "This year, it's 80 per cent. That was an incentive for us, as well."

She said local organizers are hoping for 17 to 18 teams to participate and so far, they are "looking pretty good".

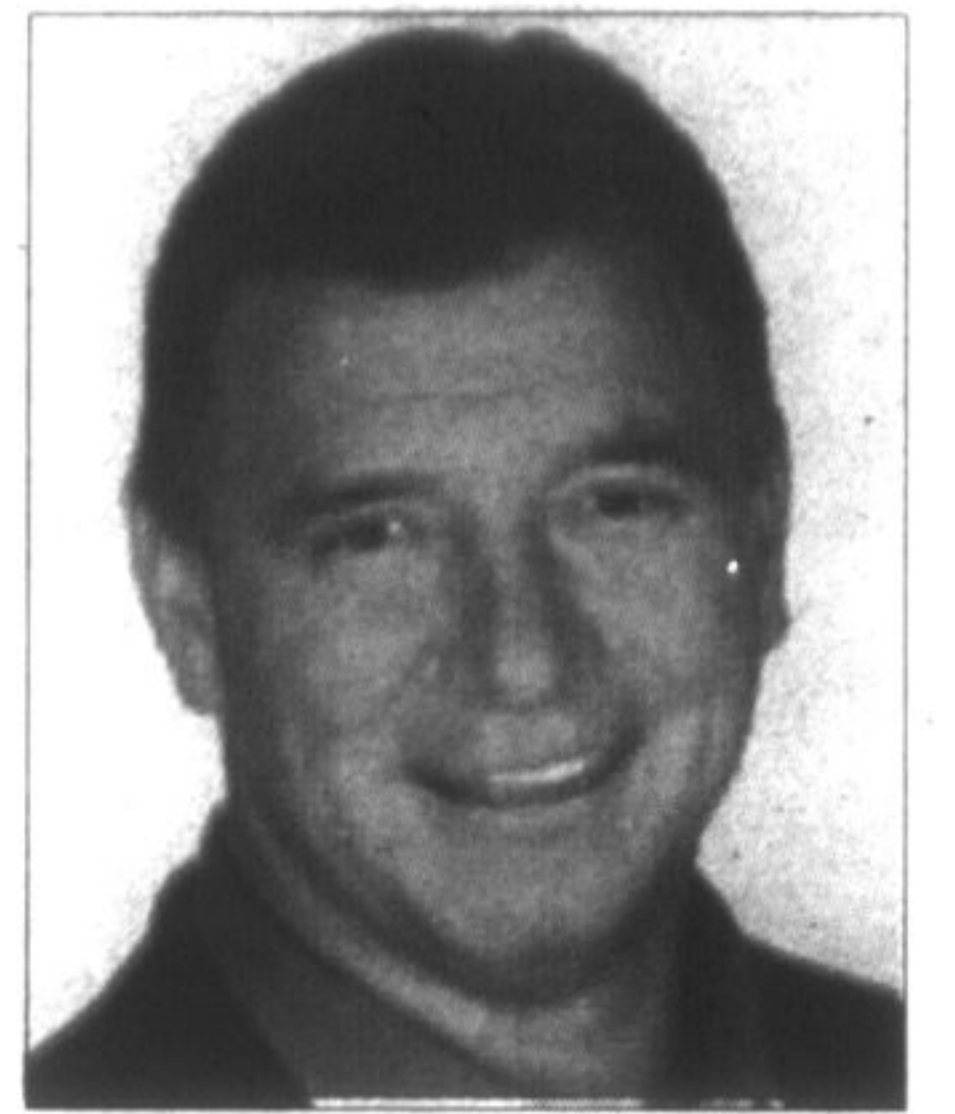
While the event is for those 18 and older, Mrs. Bartley said there will be an area with smaller wheelchairs where children can experi-

ence what its like to be in wheelchair.

The event is being held in the Stouffville Arena parking lot on Ninth Line and begins at 1 p.m.

Participants can register as late as the day of the event by showing up to the arena at noon.

Those without a full team can also register and will be placed in a team the day of the event.



RICK HANSEN: British Columbia resident is namesake for fundraisers held across Canada.

For more information can contact Mrs. Bartley at 905-640-6584 or e-mail thebartleyfamily@rogers.com.

Parade needs volunteers

Go for a walk, help a child.

The annual Wishmaker Parade - Walk For Wishes wants volunteers for its pledge-based, parade-style event.

The walk, organized by the Children's Wish Foundation, takes place Oct. 18 at Bruce's Mill Conservation Area in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Last year, \$1.3 million was raised nationwide. This year, more than 100 communities are expected to host Wishmaker Parades the same day.

For more information about The Children's Wish Foundation of Canada or to join York's Wishmaker Parade volunteer team, contact Frances Makdessian at 905-427-5353, ext. 229 or visit www.childrenswish.ca.

Volunteer chairperson Kathy Greig hopes the community comes together once more and helps create a bigger and better parade.

"We have a strong team in place, but we are looking for more volunteers," she said.

"This is the second year we are hosting a parade in

our community so we are planning an unforgettable event."

Entertainment, activities, games, clowns and face painting are a few of the attractions this year.

You can volunteer for the event, foundation spokesperson Frances Makdessian said.

"Many teenagers volunteered last year and we were able to give them community hours for their work," she noted.

According to Ms Makdessian, there is no limit to the number of hours for volunteers, starting from four hours a month and up.

There are a variety of jobs you can do, including assisting with planning and executing the parade, serving food and beverages on parade day, securing prizes, finding sponsors and seeking pledged walkers.

"There's something for everyone," Ms. Makdessian said.

The Children's Wish Foundation was started in 1983 by an Ajax resident.

Since then, the foundation has granted more than 13,000 wishes to children with high-risk, life threatening illnesses.

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