

RICHARD MUIR: Businessman donated up to \$20,0000 to charity, at first anonymously.

# Kids will benefit from \$20,000 challenge

BY KEELY GRASSER Staff Writer

When it comes to his support of charity, Richard Muir would rather you not even know his name.

The Concord businessman says he wanted to help the Jennifer Ashleigh Children's Charity, an organization with roots in Stouffville, anonymously when he pledged to match up to \$20,000 in donations in the month ahead.

But the charity asked Mr. Muir, owner of Muir's Cartage, to reveal his name in order to give the campaign a higher profile.

"It took a lot of soulsearching to be OK with that," the Uxbridge resident said, explaining he's a private person.

But it's worth giving up his anonymity to raise money for a charity he thinks is important, because it helps children when the system can't and whose parents are unable to, Muir added.

That is the mission at Jennifer Ashleigh, to help parents pay for illness-related expenses when they have no other way to do so.

The decision to match

donations was a "from-theheart kind of scenario," he

#### PLEA AT GALA

The idea took shape for Mr. Muir in May while attending the Jennifer Ashleigh annual auction and dance in Markham, where he heard about how the charity faces financial shortfalls.

Stouffville's Sandy Schell Kennedy, a senior foundation volunteer, broke the news,

"On average, assistance to 20 children is delayed every month because JACC currently doesn't have the funds

to meet the demand," the former Whitchurch-Stouffville citizen of the year said.

"This shortfall equates to approximately \$20,000 per month. In most cases, we hope to help these children in time, but more often than not it takes several months. We know timing is critical for the children to receive the assistance, and it breaks our heart to delay it, but there is just not enough money to go around."

The plea worked.

"This is the first time ever that it was announced that they wouldn't have enough money," Mr. Muir explained.

Jane Sleep, Jennifer Ashleigh's executive director, explained the shortfall is due to several factors, including increased awareness of the charity, and rising demand from families needing assistance for treatment for autistic children.

The charity now has 53 families on their waiting list and is at least \$20,000 short, on average, per month, she

The gap between available money and applications means the charity has to "thin out our assistance to every family," Ms Sleep said.

She gave an example of a family in need of \$1,200 to pay for a child's therapy, but only \$800 could be granted.

Mr. Muir wants to prevent situations like this.

"If we could do something to help them, we should be stepping up to the plate and helping them," he said.

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Giving some examples of cases that touched his heart, Mr. Muir said he heard one women speak of how she was helped by Jennifer Ashleigh. She had multiple sclerosis and had adopted children with the same condition.

She turned to Jennifer Ashleigh for help to renovate their house to make it more accessible.

In another example, he spoke of a young burn victim who required a burn suit, but the hospital was only able to give him one per year.

"So when the child outgrows the suit, what do the parents do?" Mr. Muir asked.

That's why he is willing to go so far to inspire others to pull out their cheque books. He'll match all donations made in this challenge, up to

## Stouffville baby's death lead to charity's birth

The mission of the Jennifer Ashleigh Children's Charity is to improve the quality of life for seriously ill children and their families ... "when love is not enough."

Stouffville Country Market owner Norm Clements established the charity in 1990 in memory of his granddaughter, Jennifer Ashleigh Clements. The Stouffville girl died at age six months from a degenerative, muscular disease.

Her younger sister, Danica, died in infancy of the same illness two years later.

Mr. Clements created his first sporting goods company in 1968 working from the trunk of his car. That company evolved into 18 National Sports stores across southern Ontario. In January 2005, National Sports was sold to Forzani Group Ltd.

Charity comes honestly to the Uxbridge resident. His brothers and sister served as missionaries in Africa and South America.

His own kindness to others range from assisting street children in Bolivia, sponsoring drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, to his annual Stouffville Christmas dinner for the community.

> Source: jenniferashleighfoundation.ca

\$20,000, before July 31.

"Through JACC, almost all of the money goes to the kids and the number of volunteers (who work with the charity) is incredible. It's A, a wonderful place and B, there are a lot of kids out there that just need the help."

Mr. Muir's challenge "is absolutely wonderful. It's very heart-warming. It's very encouraging. It keeps us all hopeful", Ms Sleep said.

If you want to donate ,you can mail contributions to 10800 Concession 5, Uxbridge, Ontario, L9P 1R1. Indicate the donation is in response to Richard Muir's Challenge.

You can also donate through the charity's website at JenniferAshleigh.org

That's also the place you can find a lot more information about the charity and the people it helps.



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