

United Way on course to aid 325,000 residents over 3 years

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A whopping \$30 million in three years. That's the rallying cry of the United Way York Region as it hopes to assist 325,000 people, including the elderly, newcomers, youth or individuals with developmental disabilities.

To assist in that objective, 25 dragon boat teams made up of people from leading businesses, community groups and the public sector, converged Saturday at Seneca College's King Campus and paddled to the rhythmic sounds of a drummer and steer person on Lake Seneca during the 11th annual Toromont CAT Dragon Boat Festival.

As in the past 10 paddles, this year's event was a fun-filled venture — all for a good cause.

With this year's race marking the first anniversary of their three-year plan, the United Way York Region announced during the festivities they have reached out to 120,273 people.

"To raise \$30 million, that's the fundraising objective," said United Way spokesperson Adriana Suppa. "But the real objective is to bring a social support system closer to home. In announcing we've helped 120,273 people, that's a good start because we have two more years to go."

Daniele Zanotti, United Way York Region

chief executive officer, was quick to praise the commitment of the corporations and individuals who participated in this year's friendly competition by forfeiting a day during the summer to assist in a worthy cause.

"What's amazing is this is a community rally where you get close to 1,000 people who give up a Saturday in August for the work that we (United Way of York Region) do in the community," he said.

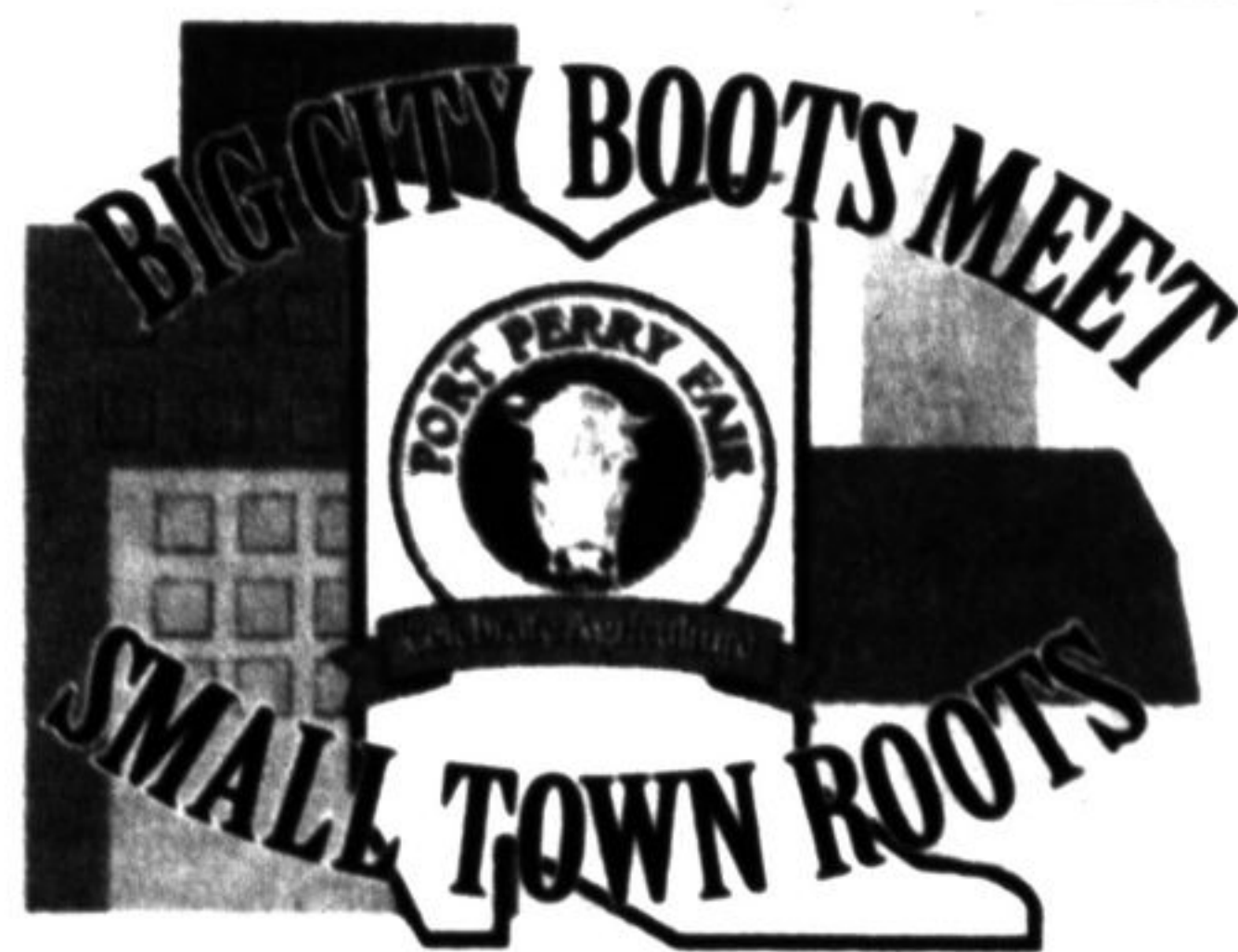
"The first year we announced we were going to try and raise \$30 million in three years. It's unprecedented in Canada for the United Way to do this. No United Way has set a commitment to help 325,000 people.

"When we talk of this in the community that there's that many people who live in York Region that need help, it's shocking. It's not a visible need in our region. Yet in one year we've helped 120,273 people get help close to home. So the need is there."

"The enthusiasm for this event is fantastic," added Hugo Blasutta, 2014 United Way York Region campaign chair. "But the most important part is that our goal is to reach out and help 325,000 people who are neighbours of ours in York Region. While we are well on our way in doing so after helping 120,273 in our first year, there's still more to do. But we have an enthusiastic group of volunteers who are helping us to reach our goal."

Trish Wilson, who served as a drummer on the York Region Media Group Chain Gang vessel, noted this year marked the sixth time they've been a part of the boat races.

"We're here to have fun and raise money and we like to dress up," she said in reference to the team horizontally striped t-shirts each member donned. "To raise money for the United Way, it's one of the charities the York Region Media Group supports. We just hope to raise whatever we can."



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