

Hundreds mark Polo for Heart's 35th season, raising \$180,000 for Heart & Stroke



By Jeff Doner

Hundreds of people gathered under sunny skies at the Toronto Polo Club in Richmond Hill for the 35th annual Polo for Heart fundraiser last weekend.

Over three days, spectators enjoyed food and refreshments and, of course, were treated to a display of one of the finest games in polo.

This year the event raised \$180,000 for the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Southlake Foundation.

"Thank you to Polo for Heart for the generous support," said Avril McAllister, Heart and Stroke Foundation vice-president of community engagement. "This is the 35th year and they have raised over \$5 million for heart and stroke research, so without organizations like this contributing to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, we wouldn't be able to do the lifesaving work that we do. We really appreciate their ongoing support."

McAllister said over 350,000 Canadians are living with the after effects of heart disease and strokes and said the funds raised this year will be designated to the Heart and Stroke Foundation Canadian partnership for stroke recovery.

Joe Newton, 66, is a stroke survivor whose recovery has benefited greatly from the type of research funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and Polo for Heart.

"Fortunately I was able to recover most of the major motor muscles through research and therapy, which also obviously recovered by ability to speak and my ability to eat," he said. "I was on a pureed diet for a month and a half. Basically I'm very appreciative of the research and the funding that the Heart and Stroke Foundation put into research for stroke recovery."

Through plenty of rehabilitation and therapy, Newton has made an incredible recovery 15 years later.

He has since retired and taken up painting with watercolours, something his neurologist said has had a positive impact on his recovery.

Also back as Honorary Chair this year was Canadian broadcasting icon, Lloyd Robertson, who championed the event for all it has done for the cause.

"I realized that this is a very important cause, because people who have strokes, many of them can recover with the proper treatment, with therapy and medication," he explained. "So much has been done with research in this area over the last several years and the \$5 million raised over the last several years with Polo for Heart at this event has gone straight into that research to make things better for people almost automatically."

Robertson said he got involved with Polo for Heart after his brother suffered two strokes, which eventually took his life.

He added there is still a long way to go in research, but events like Polo for Heart have done wonders in creating awareness and funding research. The event was even attended by some very high-ranking polo players, including Canada's Fred Mannix.

?It's a great event, because polo is not something everybody plays, but it's great to watch,? he said. ?I myself have been a rider for years and not with polo ponies, I've never tried to play, because you have to know what you're doing out there, but it's great to come out for a day like this and be a part of this kind of event.?