

Raise-a-Reader Day strikes a chord with Canadians

Canwest News Service

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Canwest's Raise-a-Reader Day was a resounding success again this year and the annual fundraiser, aimed at improving literacy, could set an all-time record.

Leonard Asper, Canwest president and chief executive officer, said the Raise-a-Reader year-long campaign would very likely bring in more than \$3 million in 2008.

"It's been the biggest one-year increase we've seen so far," said Asper. "This really is becoming an institution in this country . . . it's really been cemented as an annual event."

Thousands of volunteers hit the streets Wednesday from St. John's to Victoria and in nearly every major city in between to support the program, which trades newspapers for donations to the cause of literacy.

In Montreal, great weather helped the more than 200 volunteers, including cheerleaders from the Montreal Alouettes and mascots from many of the city's sports teams, hand out copies of the Montreal Gazette and Le Devoir to thousands of commuters. More than \$10,000 was raised and 10,000 newspapers handed out.

"I read enormously," said Paule Blais, after tucking her newspaper under her arm. She especially enjoys a good novel. "It relaxes me and takes away stress. I'm lucky that I can read," she added.

In Windsor, Ont., volunteers fanned out to 70 different locations armed with donation tins and copies of the Windsor Star. Among local celebrities who took part were former Tea Party drummer Jeff Burrows.

In Vancouver, members of the Vancouver Canucks joined hundreds of volunteers to help with the campaign.

As tallies started to trickle in, Lynne Munro, Canwest's vice-president of community and public affairs, said that totals were up in every market reporting, and that cities participating in the campaign for the first time posted substantial amounts.

For example, Kamloops, B.C., with a population of just under 100,000, raised more than \$8,000 in its debut drive. About the same amount was



CREDIT: Tyrel Featherstone/Montreal Gazette

Alex Antwi, left, digs deep to give to The Impact's mascot Tac Tik and Feli Varas in exchange for a free copy of The Gazette or Le Devoir to raise money for the Canwest Raise-a-Reader day in Montreal on Wednesday.

raised in Toronto, where 5,000 copies of the National Post were handed out.

Calgary got some Olympic-sized help from gymnastics gold medallist Kyle Shewfelt as he and a host of Calgary celebrities helped raise donations.

By the end of the day, \$16,695.59 was raised in Edmonton, with the city's police and Conservative federal candidates Rahim Jaffer and Mike Lake hawking copies of the Edmonton Journal to passersby.

Politicians were out in full force in Halifax, where the federal campaign has coincided with a municipal election. Mayor Peter Kelly and the Liberal candidate for Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, Mike Savage, were among the volunteers who helped raise close to \$10,000.

More than \$10 million has been raised by the campaign since the Vancouver Sun launched the first drive in 1997. The program went national in 2001 and now annually raises more than \$2 million a year across the country.

The beneficiaries of the Raise-a-Reader project have typically been school and public libraries and other organizations involved in children's literacy.

The money raised in each city stays in each city, said Munro, so that each campaign can target specific libraries and schools in need of funding.

With files from Vancouver Sun, Winnipeg Free Press, Windsor Star, Edmonton Journal, Regina Leader-Post, Victoria Times Colonist, Halifax Chronicle Herald, Calgary Herald, and Montreal Gazette

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