

Bears on Broadway volunteers, artists & sponsors could bear-ly contain their enthusiasm

A year-long labour of love by so many

By Peter Carlyle-Gordge

For the Free Press

CancerCare Manitoba Foundation has added a new sphere of interest to its multi faceted special event program over the last year. Bears on Broadway is a signature project that commemorates the 75th anniversary of CancerCare Manitoba in a most unique way.

Soon 62 seven-foot-tall polar bears will be gracing the median strip on Broadway from the CN Station to Memorial Boulevard for the summer until late October, to help raise funds for CancerCare Manitoba Foundation and to raise awareness about what everyone can do to reduce their risk of cancer.

Every bear has a sponsor and it's anticipated the Bears On Broadway project will raise over \$400,000 for CancerCare Manitoba. It's their largest single project ever and it's taken an army of artists and assorted technical, construction and building experts to make it all happen.

Lafarge Canada Inc. actually cast the 8,000 pound bears and the plinths they stand on, while Kapyong Barracks B17 served as the huge artists' studio necessary for the unique accessorization and artistry needed to finish each bear character.

The labour of love also involved 16 flatbed trailers needed to move the bears into place and the cranes to lift them.

CancerCare Manitoba Foundation can't thank all the volunteers, sponsors, donors and artists enough for pitching in and making Bears On Broadway such a success story. It is especially grateful to The Winnipeg Foundation, for agreeing to become the presenting sponsor, as well as to Lafarge Canada, Arnold Bros. Transport Ltd., Able Movers Ltd. and Maple Leaf Construction Ltd..

"I am very impressed by the unique bear designs the artists created," says Doneta Brotchie, Bears on Broadway Project Director. "We've got everything from the very whimsical to the highly artistic ones incorporating landscapes and Northern Lights.

"The range is amazing, everything from a biker bear to a football bear and a bear with wings."

"The fifty-one Manitoba artist involved proved that our home province talent is second to none."

This creative group included students, muralists, sculptors, fabricators and painters.

Brotchie was also impressed by how well partnerships between various artists and corporate sponsors worked out.

"Matching an artist to a sponsor based on personality and style was a challenge, but always worked out well."

She was delighted by the interaction and cooperative effort of the many distinguished participating artists, who normally work alone and in isolation.

"There was a lot of interaction, with people getting to know each other for the first time," Brotchie says. "Everyone has been touched by cancer and a number of the artists wanted to be the first to put money in our Snowbank bear even before we moved it to Broadway.

Barry McArton, Executive Director of

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CancerCare Manitoba, says the idea for Bears on Broadway began in 1999 when Chicago introduced the idea for a public art display of cows.

"The idea spread around North America and Toronto did its moose display, while Calgary did cows and Vancouver did orca whales," McArton says.

"We learned a lot from Chicago, Toronto and Vancouver about what to do and what not to do. Our project benefited directly from their experiences."

Key advice included limiting the direct selling of merchandise, ensuring the art display had a clear setting rather than being spread all over the place; and ensuring it didn't stay in place for too long, thus avoiding public boredom.

"Most of the displays in other cities were fiberglass models, but that can be a problem," McArton says. "The Toronto moose were anatomically correct with spindly moose legs, but the legs would snap easily if any weight were put on them.

"We decided to try and create bears from concrete, which is very permanent."

Another key difference with other cities was the funding. Elsewhere, the cost of creating the public art display was paid for by the city, with the cows, moose and whales being later sold at auction.

Winnipeg found a willing and eager host of corporate sponsors.

"The amazing thing is that the sponsors offered to buy their bears outright," McArton says. "They didn't want an auction, so we asked for donations of either \$10,000 or \$12,500 and got them.

"We no longer had to organize a dinner or auction thus raising money up front."

So far, Bears on Broadway has \$320,000 in the bank, but that isn't all. The bear in front of the Fort Garry Hotel is a piggy bank and the public can feed the bear to help CancerCare Manitoba.

As well, a winged bear at Polo Park is available to honour people both living and deceased. For a donation of \$75, the name of the person being honoured will be hand painted on the bear.

"Everyone has been excited by this project," McArton says. "Some of our sponsors have been taking their clients around to view their bear and the

enthusiasm is shared by all our supporters.

"When Able Movers put up a list asking for helpers, everyone in the shop volunteered."

The bears make their debut on Broadway May 26 and the original plan was to remove them all by early October. That has now been changed to the end of October, thanks to suggestions from the hospitality and tourism industry to support the Northern polar bear tourist season.

When the season is over, will all 62 bears travel away to some northern cave or perhaps a private collection?

"Some will go to the head offices of sponsors and the legal bear may end up at the Law Faculty," McArton says. "I know one will end up at the Regent Avenue casino, another two at the Children's Museum and some at Red River Exhibition Park in a permanent exhibit."

Besides brightening the city and amusing Winnipeggers, the money-raising bears have a deep emotional meaning for many people, since the funds will help improve cancer research and care.

For information and a gallery of the bears go to bearsonbroadway.com.