

CFPDP Presents Podium Cheques to Paralympic Medal Winners

When Honourable Vim Kochhar and his fellow Rotarians hosted the first Great Valentine Gala in 1985 to raise money to help support people with disabilities, it is unlikely they ever thought just how many doors they would open. A portion of the \$230,000 raised 37 years ago went towards building Rotary Cheshire Homes, North America's only communication-adapted, barrier-free apartment complex designed and built specifically for people who are deaf-blind. The gala event was so successful that a new non-profit organization was founded to organize future galas and fundraisers, then allocate the money that was raised. Since then, through the generosity of so many corporations and individuals, the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons (CFPDP) has raised over \$35 million. The money is used to create and support a wide range of initiatives designed to improve the lives of Canadians with disabilities.

CFPDP's Podium Fund is one such initiative.

At this year's Great Valentine Gala, a podium cheque is being presented to each of Canada's 2020 Paralympic medalists, who together brought home 24 medals (5 gold, 10 silver and 9 bronze) from Tokyo. This group of exceptional athletes is also being honored with the King Clancy Award for outstanding personal achievement.

In providing each medallist with this extra financial support, CFPDP is stepping in to fill a decades old void when it comes to supporting and rewarding some of our country's best performing amateur athletes. CFPDP also gratefully acknowledges the ongoing and extremely generous support of Scotiabank, a partner in the Podium Fund since 2004.

It has been more than a quarter century since the Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) first introduced a direct athlete support and incentive program. Originally called the Athlete Fund, it has transitioned over the years and today is known as the Athlete Excellence Fund (AEF). The COC AEF provides Olympians with performance awards of \$20,000, \$15,000 and \$10,000 for bringing home gold, silver or bronze medals respectively. The amount of these performance awards, often referred to as

podium or medal money, are the same whether the athlete medals in a team or individual sport.

Citing financial constraints, the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), a separate organization from the COC, is unable to provide medal money to Paralympians who reach the podium.

Although it is somewhat of a patchwork system globally, there are countries that give equal financial rewards for their Paralympians. The United States and Australia, for example, reward all Olympic and Paralympic athletes with the same amount of medal money, while the Japan Paralympic Committee only rewards gold medal winners and still with less cash than is given to their Olympic counterparts.

The Canadian Paralympic Committee has said it "definitely support[s] the idea and strive[s] to be in a position in the future to offer financial bonuses to medalists." In the meantime, the CPC offers a Paralympic Sport Development Fund, which provides grants of up to \$10,000 to sports clubs and organizations "that contribute to athlete and coach development for those on a Paralympic pathway." The funding can cover recruitment, coaching, equipment, competition and other sport development programming initiatives.

Honourable Kochhar applauds the initiatives of the CPC but at the same time stresses the need for more equitable funding for Paralympic athletes.

"Medal money is important because amateur athletes are working with tight budgets. Many rely on reward money and sponsorships for income," says Kochhar. "Paralympic athletes in particular have increased financial challenges. An athlete who is blind or has vision loss may for example require a guide to accompany them, which doubles the cost of travelling to compete. Equipment can be costly too and often needs to be customized. Rewarding our medal-winning Paralympic athletes from Tokyo with a podium cheque and the King Clancy Award recognizes their outstanding achievements at the pinnacle of their chosen sports. It is our hope that CFPDP's podium cheques will help them continue to train at the same level in the years ahead."

