

Canada's most giving real estate office

“There’s really been nowhere else in my life where I’ve experienced the relentless commitment to giving back and making a contribution to others.” By Susan Doran

Re/Max Hallmark Broker of Record Ken McLachlan is renowned for going out of his way to give back to his community, even if he finds himself impersonating Elvis Presley in the process (more on this later). And he motivates his staff to do the same.

“There’s really been nowhere else in my life where I’ve experienced the relentless commitment to giving back and making a contribution to others,” says one Re/Max Hallmark sales rep. A Toronto company with six offices and close to 500 sales associates, Re/Max Hallmark, under MacLachlan’s leadership, is the franchise’s largest contributor worldwide to the Children’s Miracle Network (CMN). Last year Re/Max Hallmark contributed more than \$120,000 to the charity, which was started by the Osmond family (yes, Donny and Marie) and raises funds for research, programs, medical equipment and pediatric care for children’s hospitals.

In Canada, 12 children’s hospitals and foundations are supported by CMN. Re/Max Hallmark’s hefty contributions go to Toronto’s Sick Children’s Hospital. The majority of funds are raised through the company’s involvement in the Miracle Home Program, in which sales associates donate a portion of the sale of each home to CMN.

“It’s not mandatory but I do guilt most of our sales reps into doing this,” says broker Debra Bain, McLachlan’s business partner. She estimates that over 90 per cent of sales reps in the Re/Max Hallmark office contribute to CMN in this way.

“Agents’ cheques are large. Who’s going to miss an amount like \$10 to \$250 (that’s the range within which most sales

donate)? They see the benefits. Giving back to the community is important and it gives the sales reps a sense of belonging,” she says.

“Some use it in their marketing,” Bain says. “Although I don’t think agents should raise funds to get business, ultimately the thing is that they DO get business. Doing good things creates a culture.”

So apparently, does doing silly things.

“One of the first events I went to when I came to Re/Max Hallmark was the Miracle Night of Stars. It was just so much fun!” says Bain. “The last Miracle Night sold out over 600 tickets at \$50 each, raising more than \$30,000 for the Children’s Miracle Network.”

This fund-raising event, which started in 1993 and is run by sales associate David Breckels, features lip-synching performances by the company’s sales reps.

“You get these agents who you think are a bit shy and over the two months of rehearsals once you dress them up it’s unbelievable to see the transformation,” says Bain. She admits to twisting in a poodle skirt behind ‘Chubby Checkers’ at the last Miracle Night.

Ken McLachlan was Elvis that evening, she says. He and a female sales rep did a take-off on last season’s Celine Dion ‘duet’ performed on *American Idol* with the King. Clearly, McLachlan – who sold beef jerky before getting into real estate 20 years ago – has come a long way, baby.

He got his broker’s license in 1989 with Re/Max Hallmark. His philosophy – “Be a contributor, not a bystander”



Debra Bain (left) with Olympic athlete Karen Cockburn, who was sponsored by Re/Max Hallmark at the '08 summer games.

– infuses the company.

The Children’s Miracle Network is the jewel in the company’s philanthropic crown. But there is much more. Through the Canadian Athletes Now Fund, Re/Max Hallmark sponsored Toronto’s Karen Cockburn in the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing, China. Cockburn won a silver medal in the trampoline event.

“I was getting all kinds of e-mails from people in the office when she was performing,” says MacLachlan. “It was really exciting for us. We’ll probably fund two athletes in the next Olympics. Funding should never be an issue for athletes.”

A few of the many other ways Re/Max Hallmark gives back:

- Since 2006 when sales rep Carolyn Griffis took on the task of helping to staff and fund a local initiative called the Student Nutrition Program, fewer school children in the area come to the classroom hungry.

“Teachers were sharing stories of children unable to focus ... some couldn’t even

keep their heads off their desks,” says Griffis.

She and her team of Re/Max Hallmark volunteers serve around 1,600 meals and snacks daily at various local schools, and helped raise \$30,000 to build a new kitchen at one so it could participate in the program. (The principal’s response was, “Is she for real? This is a dream come true!”)

To date, close to 100 Re/Max Hallmark Realtors contribute in excess of \$50,000 to the School Nutrition Program.

- The Yard Sale of the Cure, now a nation-wide fundraiser for the fight against breast cancer, started as an initiative of Re/Max Hallmark’s Toronto Beach office.

- The Re/Max Hallmark Scholarship Fund awards six yearly scholarships (totaling \$10,000) to deserving children of clients and staff who are entering the first year of post-secondary education.

- There are also Christmas toy and turkey drives; bowling fundraisers for the local Big Brothers organization (\$8,000 was

raised at last one); and more.

“We also have money earmarked to help people in the community with small projects, for instance, if a school needs a computer,” says McLachlan. He vividly recalls getting a call from Sick Children’s Hospital years ago, when Re/Max Hallmark had agreed to “adopt” the AIDS ward.

“A mother and daughter were being treated here and the other daughter in Africa had just been hit by a car. We gave the hospital \$10,000 to get the mother home. It really stuck with me – because of our involvement we were able to make difference.”

Christine Martysiewicz, director of public relations for Re/Max Ontario-Atlantic Canada, says, “Re/Max Hallmark was the first franchise to step up to the plate when Re/Max became involved with the Miracle Home Program and they continue to set the pace. Their events are top-notch . . . Their ability to mobilize volunteers . . . is remarkable. We are so very proud.” ■REM