

This edition of *real leaders* profiles one individual and two groups who demonstrate that working together can make a difference in a community. **Carol Ann Cole** raised more than \$1 million for breast cancer research by selling Comfort Hearts. Volunteers in Calgary come together for the annual **Paint the Town** initiative to paint the homes of seniors who could not otherwise afford this maintenance work. And the **Willow Street Angels** are young children who are keeping their community healthy by tidying their neighbourhood – they regularly pick up litter from the streets and plant flowers in neighbours' gardens.

*We all know someone with a heart of gold. Well, **Carol Ann Cole** has a heart of pewter. In fact, she has thousands of them.*

The story begins in 1992 when Carol Ann and her mother were diagnosed with breast cancer within weeks of one another. Until then, Carol Ann was a Vice-President at Bell Canada in Toronto and a self-described workaholic. Both women underwent treatment but her mother died less than a year later. Carol Ann vowed to fight the disease and lent support to the many cancer patients she had met while receiving treatment. Upon her return to work at



*Comfort Hearts are small pewter talismen designed to soothe the holder in difficult times.*

Bell, however, Carol Ann began to feel that she no longer belonged in a business environment and decided to try devoting herself to fighting cancer full time.

“The corporate world, while it had been wonderful for me, wasn’t really where I wanted to be anymore. I jumped at an early retirement package when it was offered to me,” Carol Ann explains.

Carol Ann grew up in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, and while visiting home on vacation, she stopped in at a store called

OceanArt Pewter. There, she discovered ‘Worry Hearts,’ small pewter talismen designed to soothe the holder in difficult times. “When I first saw them, I thought they would be such a great treat for all the cancer patients whom I knew,” Carol Ann comments. “I would give them the hearts and tell them to hold them while receiving chemotherapy treatments and encourage them to think positive thoughts. I’d tell them that I would try to send some positive energy when I held my own Worry Heart. And it really caught on. People began to want them for reasons other than cancer.”

Carol Ann already had given away 117 hearts as gifts by the time a friend suggested that she sell them to raise funds for cancer research. “I began to think that maybe this was an opportunity to raise some money so I went back to some of the survivors I’d given hearts to, just to make sure they’d be comfortable with the idea. They were very happy about it and even felt that they could be my best salespeople.”

Carol Ann approached OceanArt Pewter and asked them to be involved in the initiative. She wanted them to repackage the hearts and change the name to ‘Comfort Hearts,’ as well as slightly modify the design in order to accommodate a small hole which would allow buyers to place their heart on a key chain or wear them as a pendant. Linda Power, Vice-President of OceanArt, is herself a cancer survivor. She explains: “The disease has touched myself and my family, and we were looking for a way to contribute, to raise some money for cancer research. We had already taken on small projects, like selling suncatchers, but we really wanted to do more.”

When approached by Carol Ann, OceanArt Pewter took the Worry Heart off the market and began selling the Comfort Heart. And even now, five years after the initiative

was launched, Linda enthuses: “It’s amazing how many people are still calling in to place orders. The hearts have had a chain letter effect – people receive one for themselves and then call to buy one for their friend.” Linda says that the largest single order was for 10,450 hearts, but the majority of proceeds still come from individual orders.

The hearts sell for \$10 each, and \$6 from every sale goes towards cancer research. Originally, Carol Ann worked exclusively with the Canadian Cancer Society and to date, has raised more than \$1 million. The initiative generated a lot of interest from other organizations which also wanted to sell the Comfort Hearts. She explains: “I decided that it would be wise to work with other groups that specifically research breast cancer, like the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and the Rochester Breast Cancer Coalition in the United States.” The Rochester group already has sold almost 3,000 hearts.

This type of volunteer work kept Carol Ann busy for five years as she contributed to the cancer community in her mother’s memory. Her regular activities included speaking engagements at various cancer-related events, including being named the fall spokesperson for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation in the Atlantic provinces.

Deborah Grant is the Executive Director of the Atlantic chapter of the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation. The Foundation is the largest national fundraising body for breast cancer research and programs that raise awareness about the disease. “We are fortunate to have Carol Ann on board because she has made people so much more aware of breast cancer, and she has taken it upon herself to inform people about breast health and the importance of doing a self-examination on a monthly basis. She has empowered a lot of women by helping them to

understand the importance of looking after your own body.”

Deborah feels that the Comfort Heart initiative has complemented the Foundation’s traditional fundraising projects such as the annual CIBC Run for the Cure. She continues: “Carol Ann is the easiest, most delightful person to work with. She has an enormous amount of energy and is a great communicator with absolutely everybody.”

Last year, Carol Ann launched herself into the world of professional speakers and started Colemind, her own speaking business. “I try to balance my time between my company and my volunteer work: I now take on only a few volunteer commitments a month.”

Carol Ann greatly enjoys speaking and obtains work through her corporate contacts and as a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers. She has developed several different motivational talks and often speaks at conferences. Her most popular talk is one entitled ‘You’re All That,’ a presentation which encourages people to identify their personal skills and gives them tips on how to become self-motivated.

“I’ve heard Carol Ann speak,” says Linda Power. “She’s just phenomenal to hear. She really touches people’s hearts and she’s sincere – people open up to her, they come up to her and start talking as though they’ve known her all their lives.”

Carol Ann credits her networks and her partnerships for her success. She notes that it is a misconception to conceive of partnerships only as alliances between organizations. In fact, partnerships can be between two individuals. “We’re presented with a partnership opportunity almost every time we meet someone. If it



*Carol Ann Cole has raised more than \$1 million for cancer research through the Comfort Heart initiative.*

hadn’t been for the corporate contacts I gained while I was at Bell, I don’t think I would have had the same level of success.”

Ruth Foster is Associate Director of the Corporate Philanthropy Program at Bell Canada. She explains that Carol Ann was one of the highest regarded Vice-Presidents at Bell. As VP of the Installation and Repair Department, Carol Ann broke the mold by entering into a position that was not traditionally considered to be a female role. Ruth muses: “A lot of us think about and talk about how we can change things. But Carol Ann is one of those people who has gone ahead and made a difference. It’s remarkable what one individual has been able to accomplish. This initiative has far exceeded the potential we saw for it.”

Bell is actively involved in the Comfort Heart project. The company buys a large number of hearts annually and distributes them in various ways. The medical staff at Bell offices across Canada are given hearts to hand out to employees/patients who are suffering; some of the hearts are sent to the Canadian Cancer Society to send on behalf of Bell “with a message of hope from Carol Ann,” and the company often makes a gift of hearts to various conferences for distribution to delegates.

“These hearts are more than just a warm and fuzzy little gift,” Ruth points out. “People who receive a Comfort Heart learn Carol Ann’s story and they’re often inspired by it. They find a reason to keep the heart close and often buy hearts for others, which raises more money for

cancer research. These little hearts are even being given out at baptisms and christenings ... they’re everywhere.”

Carol Ann is an avid fitness buff and has been keeping especially busy the past few months by working on her book – entitled *Comfort Heart: The Carol Ann Cole Story* – which will appear in bookstores this fall. And she received some wonderful news when she found out, just recently, that she has been appointed as a member of the Order of Canada. “It’s such an honour!” she exclaims.

To order a Comfort Heart or to obtain more information about this initiative, call OceanArt Pewter at 1-800-407-4436 or log on to [www.carolanncole.com](http://www.carolanncole.com).

The Calgary Workplace Volunteer Council (CWVC) is a flourishing testament to the value of partnerships. An initiative of Volunteer Calgary, the Council is a group of 30 organizations, including business and nonprofit organizations, that work together to respond to their community's needs by promoting and participating in employee volunteerism.

Established in 1991, the CWVC began with a small group of visionary companies which realized that cross-sectoral, collaborative relationships are necessary for comprehensive community development. The Volunteer Council provides full members with consultant time to help design employee volunteer programs, a Speakers Series which includes topics such as social auditing and social marketing, and access to a customized library with information on employee/corporate community investment and best practice models of corporate programs. Employee/corporate volunteerism creates opportunities for business and nonprofit organizations to work side-by-side. It is a business strategy for community involvement that com-

plements traditional contributions of financial donations. Businesses encourage their employees to volunteer in the community; activities range from sharing professional skills and expertise, to delivering services and programs, and mobilizing community support.

**Paint the Town** is one creative project through which the Council promotes volunteerism in Calgary. An annual project now in its fourth year, Paint the Town is a unique initiative that supports seniors and people with disabilities who cannot afford to maintain their residences or are physically unable to do so.

CWVC chair Sheila Carruthers is also the Donations Officer for the CP Charitable Foundation and explains that many seniors on fixed incomes face difficult decisions when the financial and physical burdens of home maintenance become overwhelming. Understandably, they do not want to give up their home, neighbourhood and friends. Paint the Town allows seniors to remain in their communities.



*Volunteers learn new skills and gain a sense of pride and accomplishment from becoming actively involved in their community.*





*Paint the Town volunteers clean participants' yards, do minor repairs and paint the exterior of seniors' homes.*

Volunteers are employees of the various corporate members of the CWVC. This year, more than 400 gallons of paint were donated and 390 volunteers painted 20 houses.

“We believe that Paint the Town helps people stay in their homes,” Sheila remarks enthusiastically. “It demonstrates that for many organizations and businesses, community involvement is more than just chequebook philanthropy. This kind of hands-on volunteer experience makes an immediate difference in peoples’ lives.”

Participants chosen for the project must meet several criteria: They must own their own home, be physically unable to complete the work themselves and be living on a fixed income. Member organizations of the Council assemble teams of volunteers to clean participants’ yards, do minor repairs and paint the exterior of their homes.

Sheila is quick to point out the many benefits of employee volunteerism. The business enjoys an enhanced public image in the community for encouraging its employees to become involved. Company morale improves: Employees enjoy spending time with each other in a nonwork-related environment and are given the opportunity to build friendships with co-workers. Volunteers also learn new skills and gain a sense of pride and accomplishment from becoming actively involved in their community. And the community benefits from new talent and energy which help to support individuals and groups in need.

“Volunteerism is about being aware of your neighbours, recognizing a need in your community, being a leader and going out to make a difference. Volunteering happens every day, in every community, in some way. Through volunteerism, we can build stronger and healthier communities, then cities, then nations. The possibilities are endless!” Sheila exclaims.

Paint the Town is itself a partnership between the Calgary Workplace Volunteer Council and City Links, a program of the City of Calgary. “When we had the initial idea for the project, we quickly realized we’d need a partner because we knew nothing about painting houses,” Sheila comments. City Links is a retraining program which employs individuals in order to give them skills they need to reenter the job market. Participants usually prepare the site by scraping the exterior of the homes and cleaning the yards, and Paint the Town groups take care of the painting.

*When we share the work, we share the pride and satisfaction that comes with a job well done. What better reward is there?*

*Sheila Carruthers  
CWVC Chair*

First Calgary Savings and Credit Union has been participating in the Paint the Town project since its inception three years ago. Jan Poole, who works in the Human Resources Department at the Credit Union, says there are between 20 and 25 volunteers who take part in the initiative every year. The project helps employees get to know each other outside of the office setting. “We have such a great time together! Our incentive is simple – it’s the smile we get from the homeowner at the end of the day,” Jan enthuses.

Jan adds that the volunteer team has created its own traditions – like ordering a six-foot long submarine sandwich for lunch while working at the site. “The senior homeowners usually get a kick out of the sub! But I think my favourite part of the project is seeing the volunteers’ faces at the end of the day. It makes us feel so good to help someone in need, and in

many cases, I’ve become friends with the homeowners. I still speak to some of them on a regular basis.”

And First Calgary enjoys some important advantages as well. Jan comments that she often has been interviewed about her company’s participation in the project. “It’s important for us to get involved in the community. That way, we’re not just another faceless bank.”

Merrill Grant is the proprietor of Paint Direct, the privately owned organization which supplies the paint used by Paint the Town groups. Merrill explains that he became involved in the project when a construction company with which he works, Maillot Homes, encouraged him to do so. “The owner of Maillot Homes was already involved in Paint the Town and he approached me,” Merrill explains. “That’s when I decided to become involved.”

Merrill comments that as a businessman, he is approached by many nonprofit organizations seeking sponsorship. “But I felt that this project was the best fit. I have aging parents who might someday be in need of the service Paint the Town is providing. And I’ve been involved in volunteering for senior citizens in other ways, so I know how difficult things can be for them. It was a personal decision, and this is my way of putting something back into the community.”

Sheila offers another advantage of the project: “Because many of our clients are senior citizens, Paint the Town also helps people clue in to the challenges faced by seniors.” She emphasizes that, together, community partners can be mobilized to help overcome these challenges. “When we share the work, we share the pride and satisfaction that comes with a job well done. What better reward is there?” Sheila asks.

A group of angels has graced a neighbourhood in Ottawa, but these do-gooders don't sport halos or wings. They don't need them – all they really require are large garbage bags and their youthful enthusiasm. The **Willow Street Angels** are a group of young children, led by community activist Angela Ierullo, who regularly donate their spare time to pick up litter in their neighbourhood.

The initiative began simply enough. Angela explains: "I've lived in this community all my life. My mother was the first female real estate broker in Canada and she used to help newly arrived immigrants, offering them advice when they bought their homes." As a child, Angela remembers that her culturally diverse neighbourhood was a safe place made up of houses with lovely yards and gardens.

But in recent years, the area began to change. It became the victim of inner-city problems and absentee landlords; personal safety became a concern. "It was awful. There was litter on peoples' front lawns and no one was taking pride in their homes anymore. For me, it was certainly a source of stress and frustration," Angela comments.

She continues: "One day, I just got fed up. So I grabbed a couple of trash bags and walked around the neighbourhood picking up garbage. Three little sisters who live down the street saw me and came over to help. I think that, at first, they were drawn to my cat who was following me. But then they began to ask questions, like 'Why are we cleaning?' and 'Why are people throwing garbage onto their lawns?' I started to think that the neighbour-



*In addition to picking up litter, the Willow Street Angels tidy neighbours' yards and plant flowers.*



hood children could be my link to the community.”

In early 1996, several children asked Angela if they could help her pick up litter in the neighbourhood. After they finished their work, Angela invited the kids to her home for a glass of ice tea and a snack – but she always ensured that they washed their hands first! The team began to meet regularly and was named ‘Willow Street Angels’ because Angela collects angel figurines.

The project has developed into an important initiative. Regular activities include picking up litter, tidying neighbours’ yards and planting flowers. The team continued to grow and now comprises children and youth ranging in age from 4 to 16 years.

“The neighbourhood isn’t the same as when we grew up here,” offers Victoria Chase, a neighbour of Angela’s and resident of Willow Street. “I’ve lived here since I was 12 years old and when we were kids, we knew the people



*The Willow Street Angels present appreciation awards to some of their supporters. Angela Ierullo is standing at far left.*

who lived around us. It's not like that anymore. Angela's idea to form the Angels was fantastic because she saw that the project would connect the kids, and through the kids connect the community. It has really made the community a safer and a prettier place, and has made the kids very conscious of their surroundings."

News of the initiative spread quickly by word of mouth, and Angela approached John Dorner, principal of St. Anthony's Elementary School. "I thought it would be a good idea to go into classrooms and start talking to kids about the Willow Street Angels," Angela remarks.

"Angela already had the support of many of our key community leaders, including the Mayor," John comments. "The Angels' initiative is great because it allows leaders to recog-

nize the importance of the kids' participation in the community, and the children understand that they can make a difference."

And the kids have a great time. How is it that picking up trash can be fun? Eleven-year old Joshua St-Louis has been an angel for a year and explains: "I really don't mind picking up litter. I do it with my friends and we laugh and make jokes while we're working. It makes the time go by fast when you're with friends."

The children have lots of praise for their leader as well. Joshua enthuses: "Angela is the nicest lady I know." Eight-year-old Annie Lam says that Angela "always helps people and that is really beautiful." Stephan Nasrallah is 11 and he appreciates Angela because "she gives us kids treats and lets us play on her computer."



*Angels package recycled tulip bulbs to distribute to people in the neighbourhood.*

The Angels actively seek out opportunities to become involved in their community. In 1998 for example, the principal of St. Anthony's Elementary School decided that something needed to be done about the schoolyard. It wasn't much of a playground for the students since the entire area was covered in asphalt. St. Anthony's entered and won an 'Ugly Schoolyard' contest sponsored by the Biodiversity Institute. The award came with a \$5,000 grant to help 'green' the schoolyard, and the staff and students (several of whom are Angels) sprang into action. Until then, the Angels primarily picked up litter on the streets but principal John Dorner explains: "The Ugly Schoolyard Contest stimulated a whole new focus for the Angels." The group realized that by planting flowers and trees they could really begin to brighten the community. Now they lead holiday decorating contests at Halloween and Christmas time.

The Angels began to hold an average of eight 'community days' each year. On these days, children and community members dig up front lawns, plant perennials and bulbs, and water and weed gardens. These activities are supported by a variety of donations, with Bell Canada and Nortel as main sponsors. The Angels help mobilize the schools, nonprofit organizations and local businesses to work together to beautify the community. The group also holds an annual Spring Clean Up day and more than 300 community members participate. In addition to tidying the area, the day is a celebration and involves a barbeque, games and prizes for the children.

The Willow Street Angels have been widely recognized for their efforts and have

received numerous environmental awards, including a City of Ottawa Community Pride Award, the Madison-Arbour Environmental Award and an honourable mention from the Ontario Wildlife Association. The group also was chosen to represent Canada in a Millennium project led by the Netherlands government.

Angela notes the importance of having community partners. "We've worked with local agencies and elected officials, and our link with the schools is pivotal. The RCMP even featured us on their website because they feel that our work helps to make the community a safer place." Victoria adds: "Businesses in our area know about the Willow Street Angels and they're glad to participate and help out."

The activities of the Willow Street Angels culminate in an annual Christmas Porch Decorating Contest. Residents of the community adorn their porches and front yards with holiday ornaments and the children vote for a winner, based on which home is accessorized the best and portrays the most holiday spirit. The children also have begun a recycling initiative in which they retrieve Christmas decorations from local businesses before being discarded. The Angels then reuse the decorations within the community.

Victoria sums up the project best when she says: "The kids really love going to Angela's place. It's one thing to have community activists who are 40 or 50, but it's important to bring the kids along, to show them the value of community, to show them the value of being a good neighbour."

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