

# Here's to our unsung heroes

An Inspiration When the Brazilian Ball, Toronto's largest charity fundraiser, announces what worthy cause it will support, corporate Canada jumps on side, millions are raised, and headlines proliferate. Next year, the beneficiary will be the Princess Margaret Hospital. But when the Marilyn Van Stone Foundation raised \$35,000 for the Princess Margaret Hospital at a golf tournament last week, there is nary a mention. So here's a tribute to unsung heroes, unheralded generosity and the inspiration of a person who wanted to make a difference. Marilyn Van Stone was a mother, a legal secretary, and co-ordinator in the executive offices of the CNE. She died of lung cancer in 1986 in the Princess Margaret Hospital. The night before she passed away, she was alone with her son, Bruce, for the first time since her diagnosis eight months before. "She took my hands, looked into my eyes and said I had to do something to ensure others didn't suffer like she had," says Bruce. She was 48, he was 17. He didn't feel burdened or overwhelmed, but confident because his mother was passing something positive on to him, based on her faith in him and his faith in her. In early 1999, Bruce, who works at Merrill Lynch, and his sister, Leanne Townsend, set up the foundation in their mother's name to improve psycho-social programs for cancer patients, enhance equipment and services, and improve care for children with cancer. Their first fundraising event was a wine and cheese party at the National Club. To this day, Bruce still remembers the exact amount they raised: \$16,235. Since then, they've staged annual wine and cheese parties as well as a Christmas party with donated toys for the children at the Princess Margaret. ("I was astonished that no one had thought to give them a Christmas party," says Bruce.) In June, they launched a Legendary House tour of million dollar homes in Mississauga built by Legend Homes Inc., raising \$6,000. At last week's contest at the Carlisle Golf and Country Club in Flamborough, there was poetic justice in the fact that the biggest prizes went to Neville Kirschmann, president and CEO of the Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation, and Caroline Woodgett, wife of James Woodgett, the University of Toronto professor of medical biophysics who has pioneered gene chip technology in the war against cancer. The funds raised support his microarray lab where a robot can quickly read thousands of genes stored on a chip the size of a postage stamp to differentiate between normal and cancerous cells. Anyone whose life has been touched by cancer owes a measure of heartfelt thanks to this hitherto obscure foundation with the big heart named for Marilyn Van Stone, whose courage and vision lives on in our community.

*Written by Gillian Cosgrove, The National Post, Saturday July 22, 2000  
Reprinted with permission from The National Post*