

Fundraiser Extraordinaire

People thought he was off his rocker. Yet George Ayres had the last laugh as he proved all the naysayers wrong – eventually earning the title “Fundraiser Extraordinaire” for his efforts on behalf of children with special needs.

George and his wife Marilyn’s story goes back 50 years, when their two daughters, Margaret Ann and Janet, attended the K-W Rotary Children’s Centre (which eventually became KidsAbility). Born with cerebral palsy, the two girls received therapy at the facility located near Kitchener Collegiate Institute on King Street in Kitchener.

A crane operator at Babcock and Wilcox (where he worked for over 38 years), George wanted to give back to KidsAbility. Eventually, he decided to raise funds by running in the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic, an event held on behalf of KidsAbility. People scoffed, but George would not be dissuaded. To prepare for the run, he began training at the track by Galt Collegiate Institute, where he was often joined by Dr. Mike Lawrie (who also happened to chair the Cambridge Times Run). Together, they inspired each other to work for the good of the community.

To help support the run, George asked local Rotarians, his coworkers, fellow churchgoers and people on the street for donations. As Marilyn recalls, “George would talk to anyone, whether he knew them or not, telling them what he was doing. And they would give him money to support KidsAbility.”

The first year George participated in the Cambridge Times Rotary Classic, he obtained \$275 in sponsorship — a sum he never expected to raise. Imagine his surprise when he discovered that after 38 years of participating in the run, he had brought in more than \$180,000 — thus earning the title “Fundraiser Extraordinaire”!

In 2013, George hung up his sneakers. Yet the walls in the Golden Years Retirement Home (where he now resides with his wife) are a testament to his efforts on behalf of children and youth with special needs.

There are numerous awards and plaques from KidsAbility and Rotary, thanking the extraordinary man who refused to give up on his dream to help the organization that had meant so much to his family.



George & Marilyn Ayres

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