

## Cherry Brook Zoo gets \$21,500 from 100 Women Who Care

BEN SILCOX TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL



Martha McDevitt, director of Cherry Brook Zoo, holds the cheque for a \$21,500 contribution from 100 Women Who Care. PHOTO: BEN SILCOX/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

SAINT JOHN • Cherry Brook Zoo received a \$21,500 donation Tuesday from the Saint John chapter of 100 Women Who Care.

The group, which is comprised of 220 women, meets four times a year for presentations from local non-profit groups. Each woman donates \$100, and the proceeds are given to one of the presenters.

"All three presentations were so heartfelt," Debbie Rathwell, co-founder of the Saint John chapter of 100 Women Who Care said Wednesday. "They really all indicated a definite need for our contribution. It was a pretty emotional night, we had some tears, which we haven't had in a while."

Each member of the local chapter of the 100 Women Who Care nominates one non-profit group per meeting. Of this pool, three are drawn to present in front of the group. The group then votes for who receives their money.

Second Stage Housing and the KV Oasis Youth Centre also made presentations Tuesday.

Cherry Brook Zoo director Martha McDevitt accepted the donation.

"In my mind, it was an answer to prayer," McDevitt said at the zoo Wednesday. The oversized cheque sat in her office as she spoke of the night with a smile. "As everyone in the city knows, we need the funds."

This fiscal year, the Cherry Brook Zoo asked the City of Saint John for a \$50,000 contribution to their operating costs. The city agreed to match their property tax bill up to \$10,000 at common council earlier in February.

McDevitt noted that without the contribution the zoo gets from the city, they have been in "dire straits."

"This will give us that final push to get through the winter," she said of the \$21,500, which will be spread among several costs at the facility. "It's no cheap thing to run a zoo. Feeding animals, paying staff, keeping heat and lights on."

Rathwell said the 100 Women Who Care likely voted in majority to donate to the zoo because they recognized the hard times they were in.

"There's been a lot of negative press and challenges for them recently," she said. "Animals often tend to pull on the heartstrings, too. They demonstrated a need, in dire straits. The only funding they get now is from fundraisers, now that the city is not contributing."

McDevitt said with \$21,500 in hand, the zoo can start looking to a brighter future.

"The fight isn't over, it's not just a handout," she said. "It's a very difficult time where the zoo is getting through its first winter under new management. Our plan is to achieve building blocks to be a viable facility."

These building blocks include new enclosures and more playgrounds and ways children can "interact with the zoo," she said.

The Saint John chapter of 100 Women Who Care has made \$388,559 in donations to date. They have donated to 16 different groups since June 2013.

Rathwell noted that despite the name, the 100 Women Who Care has over 200 consistent members and is always seeking more.

"There is no limit to the amount of generous women we want to have with us," she said.