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Caring women make second contribution

RYAN MELANSON
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SAINT JOHN – The Romero House Soup Kitchen received more than \$20,000 in contributions on Tuesday evening, following the second-ever meeting of a philanthropic group of women who have made it a mission to give back to their communities.

Inspired by a phenomenon that has spread wildly through the United States and now into Canada over the last seven years, the 100 Women Who Care Greater Saint John Chapter will be meeting every three months, with each meeting culminating in a major donation to a local charity or non-profit.

The inaugural meeting in June saw \$18,500 donated to the SPCA Animal Rescue League, said Debbie Rathwell, who founded the organization in March along with close friend Kelly Patterson.

"We've seen continuous momentum building since the last meeting, even since we first announced and started to build the organization. People have really jumped on board and we're just spreading it as much as we can," she said.

With each member required to donate \$100 to the chosen charity at each meeting, the goal is a guaranteed \$10,000 donation. Because of growing membership, up to over 225 from the original 179 that met in June, the donations are even larger than anticipated.

Upon registering for the meeting, each member nominates a local charity, with three then picked randomly to each make a five-minute presentation to the group. Votes are cast

PLEASE SEE → WOMEN, C2

Membership of 100 Women Who

WOMEN ← C1

and counted immediately, resulting in cheques being written and donated on the spot.

"This is efficient, it's effective and it's immediate. That's what we continuously hear from people," Rathwell said.

"In just one hour, they get to feel the power of what's happening and know where all their dollars are going. I think it adds up to an emotional way of donating."

On Tuesday at the Hatheway Pavilion at Lily Lake, members heard from Romero House, the Saint John Arts Centre and L'arche Saint John, an organization dedicated to forging relationships between those with and without

intellectual disabilities.

Romero House may have taken the prize, but not all is lost for the other groups, said Tzigane Caddell of Rothesay, who has been a member of the 100 Women Who Care since its formation.

"It's not a winning or losing scenario, because they got the opportunity to stand up in front of hundreds of local women with chequebooks that are willing to give," she said.

Two local nursing homes that left the first meeting in June without the top prize would later receive numerous donations from group members.

"You can't help but learn about these organizations, and it just makes you want to give," Rathwell said.

Care has been growing steadily

Caddell added the setup of the meetings and the spontaneity of the donations make for something unlike any other charity experience. Women roared and cheered throughout the evening, and many spoke of how empowering being involved in the organization can be.

"It's even more exciting the second time around, and when it's all done, you're left with a real thrill. The energy in the room is incredible," Caddell said.

Carolyn McNulty, executive director of Romero House, said the donation comes at an important time.

"We had a very bad winter last year, and the summer really wasn't much better," she said. "Our numbers are just way up, we're serving over 400 people a

day. It's getting worse and it's not going to stop.

"What this will do is help us keep the place open, to let us keep distributing."

McNulty expressed nervousness at how to capture the attention of the local women in only five minutes. She gave a speech that focused on the kindness and giving spirit of the community, as well as the services of her organization, including on-site soup-kitchen service as well as outreach programs.

"I guess I won them over," she said.

Rathwell said the group has been contacted by women around the Maritimes interested in establishing their own chapter, and she expects the local chapter to grow even larger by the next gathering in December.