

Dexter gets his hands dirty launching Cops for Cancer



By Brock Weir

Red glasses perched firmly on the bridge of his nose, six-year-old Dexter Matheson gave them a reassuring tap before receiving the buzzing shears from a local hairstylist.

Approaching Inspector Paulo DaSilva of the York Regional Police with the shaver, he balked when the Inspector made an unusual request.

"I am not gonna give you a Mohawk!" exclaimed Dexter. "What do you want?"

"Take it right down. Gone," replied the inspector.

The eyes behind the red frames widened.

"You mean you wanna be bald?"

Indeed he did and Dexter was only too happy to oblige.

Dexter, a cancer survivor from Sutton, and a student at Black River Public School, was the guest of honour as York Regional Police launched their Cops for Cancer campaign at their Aurora headquarters on Thursday morning. Wielding his shears, Dexter helped mow down not only the locks of Inspector DaSilva, but also Chief Ian Laing of the Central York Fire Services, and York Region EMS Deputy Chief Chris Spearen.

"In his short life, Dexter has demonstrated courage and a positive outlook [as he] battled cancer and is an example on why cancer research matters," said Superintendent Tony Cusimano, chair of this year's campaign.

The York Regional Police have set a \$35,000 fundraising goal this year.

Cops for Cancer began in 1994 when a sergeant with the Edmonton Police Service met a boy being treated for cancer. The youngster was being teased at the school due to his hair loss from continued chemotherapy and the officer gathered colleagues for a head shave to "show other students that being bald was cool."

Since that time, the initiative has spread across the country raising over \$50 million in the process.

"[This is] a cause that is very close to my heart and close to the hearts of many people here in attendance today," said Cusimano of raising money for the Canadian Cancer Society. "Donations are used to fund research, support programs and cancer prevention initiatives. As proof of the difference your donations make, improved treatments and prevention strategies are helping Canadians live longer.

"Thanks to the research we have been able to dramatically improve the five year survival rate from 25 per cent in 1947 to over 60 per cent today. With this research, the Canadian Cancer Society is moving toward a day where more cancer will be manageable like diabetes and asthma and a day where other cancers may be cured and prevented."

Although he was in attendance to cheer on his colleagues from the police, fire and EMS, York Regional Police Chief Eric Jolliffe is remaining relatively hirsute for the time being. He will take the plunge when the campaign culminates in a large-scale head-shaving event slated for Upper Canada Mall on April 25.

"Today's Cops for Cancer launch is another example of how our members and our fellow emergency service members can make a true difference in our community," said Chief Jolliffe. "I encourage you all to participate in some small way in this campaign and either have your head shaved or encourage a co-worker to do that, or even sponsor one."

For more on the cause, visit www.copsforcancer.ca.