

King philanthropist in the limelight on Real Housewives of Toronto

By Mark Pavilons

Joan Kelley Walker is as real as it gets.

The TV host, spokesperson, model and philanthropist has entered the proverbial lion's den, as a cast member of The Real Housewives of Toronto.

The show will follow six housewives and will be an intimate look at the luxurious lives of the city's wealthiest women, from their extravagant day-to-day escapades in Toronto to grandiose getaways to their exclusive colossal cottages in Muskoka Ontario's playground for the rich and famous.

The cast of the 10-part series consists of Walker, Kara Alloway, Roxy Earle, Gregoriana (Grego) Minot, Ann Kaplan Mulholland and Jana Webb.

In terms of reality, you'll see the real Joan, 100%. She said she's come away from this experience very proud of the fact she's been herself all the way.

Since the show features very strong, assertive women, there are bound to be conflicts and resolutions. Each woman has her own vision of how things should be.

It's life, and it's true to the dynamic, Walker said.

She's really excited to see the first episode, which she promises will knock your socks off, so brace yourself!

The show is really interesting on a lot of levels. Walker admitted it was an incredible experience and the show was a great extension of her work. The personal challenge was for her to be her best.

Walker and her husband Don, CEO of Aurora-based Magna International, are passionate philanthropists. Don was named Canada's Outstanding CEO of the Year for 2014. The Walkers have multiple luxury properties including a sprawling compound in King City, a chic downtown condo, and vacation homes in both Colorado and Miami. However, their large cottage compound in Muskoka is what draws the most attention.

Joan has been involved in humanitarian work for the past 18 years and most recently visited Cambodia, via World Vision's Starting Strong program that protects children from life-long stunting and premature death. The program focusses on the health of mothers during pregnancy and newborn health and nutrition.

This time she brought her teenage children along and was so thrilled they were able to get a glimpse into the plight of others in developing nations.

I feel very blessed to be Canadian, she said. ... to be in my situation, giving back is a huge priority for me.

She finds that it's vital to visit the countries and meet the people behind the causes and issues. For those who give to charities, it's important to see just where the money goes and how to get the best bang for your buck.

The World Vision ambassador and advocate has received the Mother Teresa Award from Athol Murray College of Notre Dame and a Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal as well as World Vision's highest award Heroes for Children-Power of Generosity Award.

As a World Vision spokesperson, Joan Kelley has emceed panel discussions at the U of T, featuring international experts on HIV AIDS. She organizes and hosts fundraisers.

Joan Kelley has served as Chair of the United Way of York Region's Women's Leadership Counsel. She volunteers locally with Neighborhood Network and has served on Committee for Right to Play.

Walker is more than happy to spark up a conversation about her humanitarian work, and she was able to help promote it on Real Housewives of Toronto.

Joan Kelley's diverse career and humanitarian work have given her a unique perspective. It makes her who she is.

She just who she is, and catch a glimpse of Toronto's elite, on The Real Housewives of Toronto.

The Real Housewives of Toronto airs Tuesdays at 10 p.m. on Slice.