

Women offer community support over wine and chocolate



By Kelly Reid

Aurora's Jennifer Ettinger offered her "ultimate cheat day" Thursday night, hosting the fifth annual "Women, Wine & Chocolate" fundraiser at Cardinal Golf and Country Club.

Ettinger, a personal trainer and founder of Fit Your Style Inc., created the event in 2010 in order to raise money for the Women's Centre of York Region.

"Tonight is for women and men to come together and indulge," said Ettinger, "It's the ultimate cheat day. But what they're really doing by participating is changing a woman's life in our community. The Women's Centre of York Region is a smaller non-profit organization, and they need the support. They're really out there making it happen."

Kirsten Eastwood, Executive Director of the Centre, said, "We help women connect to employment so they can get back on their feet. We really want women to build the skills they need to be sustainable."

The proceeds from Thursday's event will be directed at the Centre's Enterprising Women program, which focuses on entrepreneurial and workplace skills. The funding for that particular initiative is coming to an end this month, and so it has the greatest need of outside support.

The Centre provides services to more than sixteen hundred women every year, with many programs on waiting lists. Their operating costs are about \$800,000 a year, not including any expansion to their programming. Community fundraising accounts for more than 20 percent of their funding.

"We are getting about a 12-to-1 social return on investment," Eastwood explained. "What that means is that for every one dollar of investment in the Centre, we can return a value of twelve dollars to the women and to the community. That means that fewer women will be dependent on social assistance. That's going to mean fewer hospital visits, fewer police calls."

The event included a fashion show from Lemon Drop clothiers, raffles, "swag bags," a wine garden, astrological readings, glamour photos, as well as an auction of a custom-made Mark Lash diamond pendant. One of Ettinger's surprises during the course of the evening's festivities included a speakerphone call to her own mom, during which the entire audience gave her mom a round of rousing applause.

"Tonight is about my mom," Ettinger said, "because when I was younger, my mom could have used the Centre. My mom is so

strong.?

The final fundraising numbers from vendor donations as well as ticket sales are still being tallied, as Ettinger jetsetted to L.A. immediately after the event in order to cover the Academy Awards red carpet with *The Insider*.

Last year's event, though, raised a total of \$31,911.

Ettinger hopes that Thursday's proceeds will exceed that number. "Thank God today, women have somewhere to go where they can get empowered and make change," she said. "To me, that's profound."

To make a donation, or to learn more about the Women's Centre of York Region, visit www.womenscentreyorkregion.com.