

Raise-a-Reader blitz hits streets today

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More than 200 volunteers clad in bright orange T-shirts will blitz downtown Wednesday morning in an annual event to raise funds for literacy programs on the Island.

Between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m., Times Colonist staff members, local celebrities, sports figures and community volunteers will be hawking copies of the Times Colonist as part of the seventh annual Canwest Raise-a-Reader Day. All money raised from the sale of the papers on the streets, as well as from newstands around Vancouver Island, will go toward literacy initiatives.

This year's special volunteers include Victoria police Chief Jamie Graham and fire Chief Doug Angrove.

Last year, more than \$260,000 was raised through the newspaper sales, as well as from sponsorships and donations. The provincial government then matched the proceeds dollar for dollar.

All of the money is given to local groups, like the Victoria READ Society, Literacy Victoria, the Greater Victoria Public Library and school libraries.

The Raise-a-Reader program, first launched by the Vancouver Sun in 1997, now takes place in 28 communities across Canada. Since it became a national initiative in 2002, it has raised almost \$13 million.

Claire Rettie, executive director of the Victoria READ Society, which helps people of all ages overcome reading problems, said the donations provide financial assistance to school-age children from families who can't afford the extra help.

Last year, Raise-a-Reader funds helped 10 children with the roughly \$3,200 each to pay for the READ Society's remedial program.

That program, which serves about 250 children each year, starts with an assessment and then continues for 10 months, Rettie said.

She said the newspaper often becomes a tool in the literacy programs.

"It helps us connect our students with people in the world. You take it and people understand that other people in the world are interested in this," Rettie said.

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