

Literacy campaign raises \$240,000

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Vancouver Island literacy programs hit the jackpot yesterday as people donated thousands of dollars to the annual Canwest Raise-A-Reader campaign.

It would have been hard to miss the army of more than 200, decked out in bright orange T-shirts, as they staked out downtown street corners and Peninsula Co-op locations hawking newspapers in exchange for a donation.

A total of \$240,000 was raised this year, according to campaign chairwoman Kathy Baan. That includes money raised yesterday and through other activities, including the Victoria Seals Raise-A-Reader night, the Times Colonist 10K run, the Royal Victoria Marathon and February's Times Colonist book drive and sale.

The provincial government will donate \$175,000, bringing the total to \$415,000. The money goes to more than 140 Island organizations, from school libraries to the Victoria Read Society, for literacy projects.

Some people donated spare change, while others dug in their pockets for \$5 or \$10 bills. One woman who didn't have anything else gave a 20-pound note from the Royal Bank of Scotland. It was worth \$35 Canadian. Another woman who had already donated returned a few minutes later with 20 rolls of pennies she was taking to the bank.

At the corner of Government and Broughton streets -- also known as Poet's Corner -- Victoria police Chief Jamie Graham and other officers teamed up with local poets, including the city's poet laureate, Linda Rogers.

Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid and Oak Bay-Gordon Head MLA Ida Chong were among the volunteers, who included players from the Grizzlies, Rebels, Salmon Kings, Seals, University of Victoria and Pacific Sport athletes, firefighters, police officers, and Peninsula Co-op and Times Colonist employees.

Editor-in-chief Lucinda Chodan said despite tough economic times, many still gave generously. "People understand that literacy can make a difference between being able to get by and not getting by," she said.

Since its national launch in 2002, the campaign has raised \$13 million for literacy programs in Canada.

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