



Monday, June 27, 2005

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No limits for Regent Park Event raises money for computers for students



RAFAEL BRUSILOV/FOR METRO TORONTO

Toronto artist Matisse performs at a local charity event held recently by Sky's the Limit Youth Organization. The money from the event will put computers into 100 underprivileged students' homes.

The sky may still be the limit for 100 high-school kids in Regent Park, but high technology won't have to be — they're each getting a computer, free of charge.

Generous donors at a charity event held recently by Sky's the Limit Youth Organization at Lula Lounge at 1585 Dundas St. W. dug deep and gave \$20,400, with Internet and mail donations still trickling in, surpassing the \$20,000 goal needed to put computers into 100 underprivileged children's homes.

"It was a huge success. A lot of people donated," said Lara Tavares, founder and head of Sky's the Limit. The money will also help pay to tutor kids to use their computers.

"It's pretty overwhelming to think that something as small as a \$200 donation can drastically impact a child's life. I grew up with a computer in my house, so I was always very aware of what an important tool the computer is," Tavares said.

The event is becoming an annual tradition, following from last year's inaugural success, and was hosted by Tanya Phillipps of Raptors NBA TV. Featured were performances by Toronto-bred artists Matisse and Adrian Eccleston, as well as a silent auction of 60 items donated by supporters of the charity, including a hockey stick signed by the entire Maple Leafs team as well as a four-hour driving pass for a Ferrari 360 Spider.

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The program is three-way collaboration between Sky's the Limit, Pathways to Education (a charity that puts Regent Park kids into high schools) and reBOOT Canada, a non-profit organization that refurbishes used computers from businesses and landfills.

Kelly Zorzi, a development officer at Pathways to Education, said the realities of modern life make education with computers not just a privilege, but a necessity.

"If you don't have access to computers and don't have access to the Internet, you don't really have access to the working world, to academia, or even to extracurricular activities. A computer is like a piece of furniture or a refrigerator now — some kids don't even get textbooks to take home anymore." Zorzi said.

As one of Toronto's poorest neighbourhoods, Regent Park has long struggled to keep kids in school. The dropout rate for high school students has traditionally hovered at a whopping 60 per cent, far above the city average, but Zorzi says in four years the Pathways program has shrunk that figure down to 20 per cent. Next year, the program will sport a full cohort of over 700 kids, 200 of whom will now be able to word-process their assignments instead of laboriously writing them out by hand.

Phillipps says she's impressed with the program's results.

"The kids in this program are totally committed; they've invested in it. It's a good news story about Regent Park," Phillipps said.

RAFAEL BRUSLOW FOR METRO TORONTO

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