

Sask. Valley Riding Club raises \$102,000 for Telemiracle



Participants of the 1997 Telemiracle Trail ride.

by Christopher Kirkland

Every year, groups, clubs, and individuals across Saskatchewan participate in perhaps the most impressive charity event in the world, digging deep to raise funds for Telemiracle. And for many years, one of the most consistent and hard-working of the those groups has been the Sask Valley Riding Club. Created by locals residents Ray and Noreen Kneeland, the club has been holding a wide variety of events every year for the past decade, with all proceeds going to the Telemiracle Foundation. Over those 10 years, they've raised a very impressive \$100,000.

According to Ray Kneeland

the idea to dedicate their efforts to Telemiracle came as the group was evolving from a 4H club into a riding group, and really took hold after he saw first-hand the positive effects of the Telemiracle funds. "Right around 11 years ago, I came up with the idea to do a ride to Regina to raise money for Telemiracle—I was planning to do it in March, but with the weather and all the timing wasn't so good. But Gerry Popplewell, who was running the *Village Press* then, suggested I do it in the summer, so that more people could go along. So we did that . . . and after a few years, people in the club pointed out that it wasn't very scenic along the

highway, so they wanted to ride north in the forest areas. We've done that route for the last seven years, and we average around 30 to 35 riders per year.

"We had got going with rides for Terry Fox prior to anything with Telemiracle, and then at one point we went to a Mini-Miracle fundraiser in Martensville, and when I heard some of the people come up and explain how they'd been helped it was pretty powerful. It made me think that I've had a whole lot of help and good fortune through my life and I've been really thankful for it, and I've always had the belief that if I can help other people get what they need, I'll get all I need. It certainly has worked that way and then some."

Over the years, the Kneelands and the club have expanded their fundraising efforts a variety of ways, all of which allowed them to hit a significant milestone this year, says Kneeland. "Last year, in our 10th year of doing it, we hit a grand total of \$102,000 raised, which we're pretty proud of. In conjunction with the ride, we've been

holding gymkhanas for several years, and we have a concession on the ground during those as well, and all the entry fees and concession money go to Telemiracle, and we've also been holding open-air dances. About five years ago, we upgraded the dances to a dine-and-dance, and that's been very popular. So it's all helped out, bringing in money here and there."

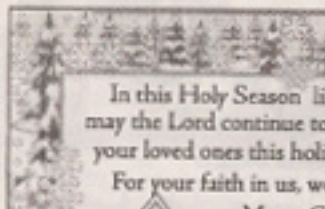
While Kneeland is praised by other club members as the main force behind their Telemiracle efforts, he makes it very clear that their support and enthusiasm is crucial, and something which brings him great inspiration. "That's what keeps me wanting to do it—they're all so excited to keep going and it's so great to have people like that around you, I keep think about how lucky I am to be in a group like this. There's so many good people in this club, and we're enthusiastic as ever."

"We have a great time together, and that's really the whole point—when we have things like the rides or the rodeos, some people might call it work, but I say it's not work when we're enjoying it so

much. When you're enjoying everything, it's a pleasure—I never want to quit doing it."

Moreover, while he brings the ideas, and club members bring welcome enthusiasm, Kneeland has no doubt that none of this would be possible without the organizational skills and tireless efforts of his wife, Noreen. "I absolutely have to say that none of this would happen without Noreen's management skills—that lady is just phenomenal when it comes to organizing everything. I'm just the guy with the ideas, but everyone in the club knows that she's the one with the ability to plan things out and make them as successful as they are. She deserves as much or more credit than I do—without her, all of this would be pretty hard to pull off."

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