

# Volunteer Immersion

By Daniela Alusik

**F**resh off the plane as an LES intern at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing last June, I found a unique way to get to know everyone and learn everything I could about my new workplace.

While working in the Embassy's International Business Development Office, I answered a call for volunteers to organize the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign (GCWCC). As an MBA student at the University of Victoria, I had already been involved in such efforts as food bank drives and charity runs. Along with Peter Forster, a fellow LES and UVic grad, I became a co-captain of the GCWCC, marking the first time that LES have organized the mission's campaign.

Peter, who has worked at the Embassy for 11 years and is the contract engineer officer there, quite possibly knows more about how to get things done than almost anyone else. He organizes yoga classes, "Volleyball Thursdays" and, every May, a pig-roast/potluck—an event that includes a volleyball tournament involving the Embassy's different sections. Among other volunteer events, the mission participates each year in the Beijing Hope Run (previously known as the Terry Fox Run), while the LES coordinate clothing drives, raise funds for stray cats and put on a typical Chinese New Year celebration.

The GCWCC campaign could never have succeeded without the wholehearted involvement of all staff. The LES, especially, set up audiovisual equipment, translated posters and found everything from plates and cutlery to caterers. They were also some of our most enthusiastic supporters and participants.

We sold more tickets to a kickoff pancake breakfast and silent auction—graciously hosted by Ambassador David Mulrone and his wife Janet Wakely—than there were people working at the Embassy. Staff donated supplies from syrup to coffee, and dug through closets and drawers for 200 items to auction. At a spirited "Embassy Idol" event they sang and danced for talent judges: Ambassador Mulrone played a convincing Simon Cowell, Madame Wakely an amazing Paula Abdul, and Jeff Nankivell, minister and deputy head of

mission, an intense Ryan Seacrest. Belly dancers entertained at an "Arabian Nights" wrap-up dinner.

The campaign raised a total of \$22,891 from DFAIT staff—15 percent over our goal and more than double the funds raised just two years ago. Across the Embassy, including all of the different government departments, a total of \$34,195 was raised.

Peter and I were deeply honoured to receive framed certificates recognizing our efforts, presented by Prime Minister Stephen Harper last fall when he was in China. What an incredible and unexpected honour—a memory I will treasure always. Peter and I hope the campaign might serve to inspire others to break the record.

One thing I hadn't known when I arrived at the Embassy was the difference between LES and CBS. Throughout the campaign I only saw people working together toward shared goals—regardless of their acronyms.

*Daniela Alusik has returned to Victoria and is looking for work in the field of international development.*



Peter Forster and Daniela Alusik whip up the volunteer spirit.



Daniela Alusik and Peter Forster receive framed certificates from Prime Minister Stephen Harper.



Ambassador David Mulrone (front) and others flip pancakes at a kickoff breakfast.