

LYDIA ARNOLD FUNDRAISER UPDATE

PRIDE IN ST-PIERRE-JOLYS

I am incredibly proud to be a resident of St-Pierre-Jolys.

Allow me to explain...

One year ago, I joined the community of St-Pierre-Jolys when I purchased the town's local grocery store. I had grown up in a rural community, so I was used to life in a small-town and did not anticipate any big surprises. In contrast to city life, I knew I could expect the friendly waves from relative strangers passing on the street, cars left overnight with doors unlocked, and the comfortable friendliness that comes from a small community of people who have known each other for years.

I was not, however, prepared for St. Pierre. People in St. Pierre are not just "friendly," they are unusually warm, welcoming, and genuine. When a non-Francophone outsider bought their grocery store and moved to town, they accepted him with open arms, genuine smiles, and a surprising amount of patience when it came to his feeble attempts to learn their language! After a year of watching how the people of St. Pierre laugh, joke, dance, and party, I am sure you could not find a better example of people who have learned to enjoy life to its fullest.

Just when I thought I had begun to fully appreciate the extent of St. Pierre's sense of community and generosity, the Lydia Arnold Fundraiser came along. Lydia Arnold is a beautiful four-year-old who lives in St. Pierre with her parents, Michael and Linda Arnold, and brother, Tobias. Lydia has a deadly heart condition called restrictive cardiomyopathy which will ultimately kill her. Her only hope is a heart transplant which she will hopefully be receiving in the very near future. The Arnolds face a tremendous number of challenges in the months ahead, and one of those was finances. Lydia's post-surgery recovery in Edmonton is expected to last 2-6 months, during which time her family will not be receiving a regular income. Furthermore, the Arnold's face thousands of dollars in drug-related costs.

Having learned of the financial challenges the Arnolds faced, I had the opportunity to begin helping organize a fundraiser in support of the Arnolds. The first question we needed to answer as organizers was... where should we hold it? We thought of holding it at the St. Pierre Rec Centre, but that seemed too ambitious. After all... max capacity at the Rec Centre is almost three-hundred people... it would feel really empty if only a few dozen people showed up! We decided to take a risk and booked the hall. Next came the problem of advertising. No sooner had we ventured the question when Tammy Gigolyk from Sundown Graphics offered to not only professionally design all of the event's promotional material but cover all the printing costs as well. When it came to the food we would serve, Luc Peloquin from Lucky Luc's stepped forward and offered to provide all the cheesecakes we would serve. As the planning progressed, we



Beautiful Lydia Arnold



Parents, Michael and Linda Arnold



Touching slideshow of Lydia's journey

were overwhelmed by the sheer number of people and businesses who stepped forward to donate their time, expertise, and finances towards the event.

The night of the fundraiser arrived and found the event's organizers still nervous. Would people show up? Would they enjoy the evening? Would our fundraising goals be met? We soon received our first indication that the evening might surprise us. At 7:00, people started streaming into the hall. Thinking we had put down the wrong time on our posters, I quickly checked it. Nope! No mistake there... it still said the event only started at 8:00, so why were people showing up an hour early? By 7:15 we were no longer worried we would fill the hall, and by 7:30 we had begun to panic. All the seats were filled, and people were still arriving. By the time we got started at 8:00, three-hundred guests were seated, and one-hundred guests were left standing.

The evening was incredible. The hundreds of hours poured into the event from dozens of volunteers paid off. The decorations were beautiful. The cheesecake was delicious. The crackers and cheese was scrumptious. The wine... well, you know how French are with their wine! The local entertainment was amazing, and Corny Rempel's Elvis Tribute and Comedy concert was unforgettable. The movie showcasing Lydia's courageous journey reminded us why we were there and left very few dry eyes. Someone mentioned we could have met our fundraising goal for the evening simply by selling boxes of Kleenex immediately after the movie had ended!

By the time the evening was over, we knew the fundraiser had been an incredible success, but it was hard to predict just how successful. People had been unbelievably generous, not just at the fundraiser itself, but also in the days leading up to the event. Dozens of donations had already been collected from people who were unable to attend the fundraiser but still wanted to show their support, and thousands of dollars had been raised through silent auction raffle tickets pre-sold at St. Pierre Bigway and St. Pierre Garage. When we had started organizing the event, those among us with level heads had predicted a modest \$5,000 being raised, while the real dreamers predicted \$10,000 and even \$20,000. Imagine our shock when after tallying the numbers we arrived at a staggering \$33,000! We could hardly comprehend the generosity of those who had contributed. Since then, that number has grown with a steady stream of donations still trickling in. When I checked today, we were sitting at over \$36,000!

So... that is why I am incredibly proud to be a part of the community of St. Pierre. In St. Pierre, people take care of their own. They show their love and support in actions as well as words. They take the time to stop and enjoy life, even when there is only standing room. They are a shining example of what a community can and should be, and I am proud to be a part of it.

Sincere regards,

Mark Duddridge



Trevor Schreimer was one of the local entertainers enjoyed that evening



Unbelievably generous crowd



Elvis's bodyguards



Elvis dazzles the audience