

# LESSONS FROM THE FRONT:

## OUR MILLENNIUM & THE MOBILIZATION OF CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

In May 1999 Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) launched its first nationwide initiative, an ambitious grassroots campaign called *Our Millennium*.

Coordinating the 18-month program was an extraordinary experience, full of challenges, hard-won successes, and plenty of important lessons. As part of CFC's contribution to the International Year of Volunteers we would like to share with you the story of *Our Millennium* and our efforts to mobilize Canadian communities.

This report is designed to be a practical roadmap for our partners in the voluntary sector, a guide that reveals the high-points - and potential hazards - along the road to community mobilization. It outlines the structure of the program, its impact on various audiences, and the success story behind the country's most active *Our Millennium* participant, the city of Hamilton, Ontario, which registered more than 1,000 millennium projects.

### THE VISION

*Our Millennium* grew out of Peter Aykroyd's deep belief that the passage to the next millennium was a momentous event – one that people would feel compelled to mark. Peter had witnessed the enthusiasm and optimism generated by a similar milestone as one of the organizers of Canada's Centennial celebrations.

CFC wanted to capture and harness that energy. And Canada's growing network of community foundations was the perfect vehicle. Together, community foundations could join the momentum behind the millennium and direct it toward strengthening Canadian communities.

At the same time, Canadians were looking for meaningful ways to mark the millennium. *Our Millennium* invited them to get together with a group and decide on a "gift" to give their community in honour of the millennium. Then it gave them an easy way to leave their own legacy of this historic milestone: every millennium

### **Community Foundations of Canada**

Community foundations are one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic networks dedicated to building and strengthening communities in Canada.

### **What do community foundations do?**

- Pool the charitable gifts of many donors into permanent, income-earning endowment funds that benefit local communities
- Make grants from the earnings of these funds to support a wide range of local initiatives
- Provide leadership to their communities by bringing people together from all sectors to identify and address local issues

Canada's 110 community foundations hold combined assets of more than \$1.4 billion. During 2000, they made over \$70 million in grants to support local priorities across the country.

project would be recorded in an on-line gift registry and preserved for future generations.

## THE LEGACY

By the time *Our Millennium* ended on December 31, 2000 Canadians from every province and territory had participated in the program. The results included:

- 4.6 million Canadians involved in *Our Millennium* projects
- 6,558 millennium projects registered
- Almost 800 communities participated
- More than 700 media stories generated
- More than six million visits to *Our Millennium's* website
- Raised more than \$4.32 million and \$7 million in-kind support
- Received the Peter F. Drucker Award of Merit for Canadian Nonprofit Innovation
- Became the first website in history to be added to the permanent collection of The National Archives of Canada
- The archives also organized an eight-month *Our Millennium* exhibit in Ottawa

**"The contribution of financial capital may be limited to the wealthy. But the creation of social capital is within the power of each and every citizen."**

*-Sherri Torjman, The Caledon Institute of Social Policy*

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## ANATOMY OF A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGN

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*Our Millennium* was run by a network of more than 60 local coordinators, most of whom were connected to a member community foundation. In areas without a community foundation, such as St. John's, Newfoundland, the *Our Millennium* coordinator worked with the local volunteer centre or another organization.

In Québec, CFC partnered with the Federation de centre d'action bénévole to coordinate the program, with the exception of Québec City, which has its own community foundation.

CFC provided member foundations, and other organizations interested in participating in *Our Millennium*, with a national framework, themes, materials, and approximately \$700,000 in financing. In some cases additional funding and local donors were found to support *Our Millennium* within the community.

*Our Millennium's* sponsors included the Government of Canada's Millennium Partnership Program, which provided the financial foundation for the program's success and scope. Other sponsors included The Co-operators, The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), The Business Action Program of the National Crime Prevention Center and Rogers Media.

Aside from their financial contributions, The Co-operators and CIDA also committed to registering gifts in *Our Millennium* categories that matched their organizational goals, which were safety and global citizenship, respectively.

## **MAKING *OUR MILLENNIUM* A REALITY**

Like any national campaign, CFC knew that *Our Millennium* would rely heavily on its network of front-line coordinators. That's why the project's small national office was squarely focused on supporting communities in their efforts to generate local enthusiasm for the program.

*Our Millennium* coordinators were provided with three critical tools early on:

1) The Catalogue of Possibilities: Described as the “creative spark” behind *Our Millennium*, the Catalogue of Possibilities captured the program's essence. It became *Our Millennium's* calling card – a tool that ignited interest and inspired action. It explained the program and provided contact information, a gift registration form and more than 100 millennium project ideas.

2) Our Millennium Tool Kit: A colourful collection of essential resources that included everything from a sample media kit and stock presentation, to ideas for a media launch and information about graphic guidelines.

3) Community Mobilization Guide: a practical how-to guide created to help coordinators develop their own local plan for *Our Millennium*.

### ***A Crash Course in Community Organizing..***

For some community foundations, *Our Millennium* was their first community activity. The Community Mobilization Guide provided newer members – as well as more established foundations – with a crash course in community organizing. It included ideas on everything from setting up your steering committee and identifying community champions, to celebrating your successes.

The guide also included information and examples from other community foundations about:

- Setting local objectives for the program
- Identifying other local millennium initiatives and partnership opportunities
- Building a community profile to spread the news
- Building internal capacity
- Recruiting an *Our Millennium* team and organizing an orientation session
- Creating an action plan
- Organizing a launch event and working with local media
- How to register millennium gifts

While local coordinators introduced *Our Millennium* to service clubs, town councils, church groups and scout troops, the national office searched for sponsors and worked on creating national momentum for the program.

Each coordinator ran his/her own local campaign, but was tied into the larger program through an array of national initiatives. These included paid advertising (featuring Dan Aykroyd and *Our Millennium* participants from across Canada), public service announcements, public relations initiatives (including a New Year's Eve concert by the Tragically Hip), media relations (including a cover story in Canadian Living magazine) and a partnership with the Canadian Community Newspaper Association.

Local coordinators stayed in touch via conference call and a series of regional meetings scheduled at various points throughout the campaign.

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## ACHIEVEMENTS

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Part of the beauty of a grassroots program is watching its effects expand outward, like ripples in a pool of water. The impact can be seen and felt at many different levels.

The information in the next two sections is based on *Our Millennium* evaluations completed by local coordinators after the program concluded on December 31, 2000.

Based on these evaluations, the program's benefits fell into three main categories:

- 1) Program results
- 2) Impact on community foundations
- 3) Overall community benefit

### 1. PROGRAM RESULTS

Coordinators noted the following benefits as a direct result of participating in *Our Millennium*:

**New volunteers:** The majority of participants were able to recruit new volunteers to participate in *Our Millennium*.

**New partnerships:** Virtually all of the program participants established new partnerships and links with other organizations in the

#### ***Potholes on the Road to Success:*** Challenges associated with *Our Millennium*

Every national program comes with its own challenges and *Our Millennium* was no exception. The most significant challenges mentioned by local coordinators include:

- **Millennium fatigue:** While celebrating the millennium was timely and a good way to attract attention, many foundations reported their communities were already overwhelmed by Y2K-related information and activities.
- **Lack of resources:** Too many priorities and too little time... a familiar refrain among voluntary organizations. *Our Millennium* was no different. At least one-third of foundations reported not enough staff or funding to devote to the program.
- **Importance of board commitment:** Some foundations said their Board did not see how *Our Millennium* fit into local priorities. Without their help – and contacts – the program was difficult to implement.
- **Keeping it simple:** The program's complexity caused confusion on a number of levels. Some felt the concept itself was too difficult to communicate, others focused on the terminology of 'gifts' and 'a gift registry.' Still others expected the registry to function as a grant program, since they related that role to community foundations.

community. The majority of foundations reported between five to 10 new relationships with groups such as Guides and Scouts, schools, municipal committees and volunteer centres.

**Endowment funds:** About half of the participants reported that they were able to create one or more endowment funds as a result of *Our Millennium*. Edmonton created the largest fund – \$4 million – raised in concert with many other community organizations.

**Relationships with media:** Every foundation received media attention as a result of *Our Millennium* and many reported improved relationships with their local media.

## 2. IMPACT ON COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

Community foundations that participated in *Our Millennium* noticed significant benefits in two critical areas:

**Increased profile:** Virtually every foundation said *Our Millennium* raised their community profile and helped them build new relationships with organizations that were previously unaware of their work.

**Capacity-building:** About one-third of foundations, mostly in Ontario and Western Canada, noted a positive impact on their own internal capacity in areas such as grantmaking, volunteer improvement, personal knowledge of community players and overall community needs. A few foundations also mentioned that *Our Millennium* helped their Board expand its vision of the foundation's role within the community.

## 3. OVERALL COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Foundations cited a wide range of community benefits thanks to participating in *Our Millennium*, but several were mentioned the most often:

**Reinforcing social capital** While few foundations used the words “social capital,” the examples and descriptions they chose definitely fit in that category. For example, many communities spoke of “reinforced community-mindedness” or “caring community attitudes.” Others spoke of “stimulating wider citizen engagement” or helping people “take ownership and pride in their communities.”

**Recognition and celebration of community:** *Our Millennium* also gave communities a reason to celebrate! A number of foundations held events to recognize the community's *Our Millennium* participants. These celebrations introduced people to the richness in their own community and fostered pride and excitement. They also provided a unique networking opportunity for different members of the community – particularly those with no group affiliation or groups with no formal structure.

**The millennium gifts:** The concrete millennium gifts, given as part of *Our Millennium*, were, of course, also mentioned as community benefits that will exist long

after the program is completed. These projects included new or restored community facilities, new programs for particular groups such as youth or seniors, and new neighbourhood initiatives such as community gardens or playgrounds.

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## LESSONS LEARNED

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*Our Millennium* was an invaluable learning experience for Canada's community foundation movement – a leap of faith that turned into a priceless opportunity. The lessons we learned while running this program will affect our work, at every level, for years to come. Can you capture four years of blood, sweat and tears in four bullet points? We'll give it a try...

Key learnings from *Our Millennium* include:

### **PLANNING + FUNDING = SUCCESS**

CFC started organizing *Our Millennium* in 1997, but a delay in firm funding commitments made local planning challenging.

### **COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION REQUIRES SOPHISTICATED SUPPORT**

Some foundations didn't have the capacity to implement a program of *Our Millennium's* size and scope. Resources need to be allocated for capacity development tools such as relationship building techniques and planning tools.

### **STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN NATIONAL AND LOCAL NEEDS**

Building national momentum vs. supporting local needs... consider both goals when determining your communications strategy and tools. For instance, while local foundations appreciated and used many of the tools and materials provided by the national office, some costly efforts, such as PSAs and paid advertising were not as successful at the local level.

### ***Growing Grassroots.. A Recipe for Success***

Whether they lived in Canada's biggest cities or its most rural communities, *Our Millennium's* local coordinators had no trouble agreeing on what they needed to make the program a success.

Most community foundations listed the following key factors as critical to running a successful grassroots program:

- The presence of a **local coordinator**, either full or part-time
- A **strong network of contacts** in the community, including volunteers, staff or Board members
- Good local **media coverage** of the program
- Strong volunteer involvement

Other helpful ingredients included:

- The importance of direct **one-on-one presentations**
- Additional **funding**
- A partnership or good **relationship with local municipality**
- Active **presence at community events**

## ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

As organizations evolve they need different support mechanisms. National programs need to be designed in stages, so organizations can tailor them to fit their capacity. This approach would also encourage broader participation.

### Lessons From the National Registry

Our Millennium's national registry contains the personal stories of more than 4.6 million Canadians and the details of more than 6,500 millennium projects. It represents a goldmine of information – an irreplaceable snapshot of Canadians at the beginning of the new millennium.

The Caledon Institute of Social Policy recently completed an in-depth analysis of the projects recorded in Our Millennium's national registry (Social Capital and the 'Our Millennium' National Project, Sherri Torjman and Eric Leviten, April 2001). The paper examined the theory of social capital and applied it to Our Millennium.

"Social capital is built and maintained through the active efforts of individuals, groups and organizations. The projects that comprise the Our Millennium gift registry embody the many different ways that people in communities act to foster the relationships and norms that enhance their ability to work together for the common good."

The report's findings are fascinating. For instance, the most popular gift categories were environment (16.3%), heritage (16.2%) and children and youth (13.2%). And the most popular gift was a work-of-art that is imaginative, immensely practical and has brought groups of Canadians together for hundreds of years – the quilt.

More than 100 groups across Canada – including kindergarten classes, immigrant and refugee women, artists, seniors and kids with special needs – all decided to create a special quilt to mark the new millennium, a fitting metaphor for the program and its national registry.

"... Quilts are the concrete embodiment of a collective effort," says the report. "They show the value of many hands working together. The individual pieces, when viewed as a whole, create new value."

The report also contributes to CFC's growing collection of lessons learned from Our Millennium, for example:

Generating voluntary activity takes investment: "Voluntary activity does not just happen voluntarily. Extensive volunteer action actually is the result of a significant investment of resources at the local level."

***Lessons from the National Gift Registry (cont)***

Community champions are key: “Citizen engagement usually requires a catalyst to promote that engagement... In some cases, an individual involved in a school network was able to kickstart a wide range of activity... or in some very small communities, there probably was a single champion – either individual or family – who encouraged others to participate in *Our Millennium*.”

Where’s the private sector? “Overall there was very little private sector involvement. Business sector sponsors organized only a handful of projects... Otherwise private sector involvement typically took the form of sponsorship and donation of equipment or team uniforms for sports events.”

# OUR MILLENNIUM CASE STUDY

## HAMILTON, ONTARIO: A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

When *Our Millennium* was launched in May 1999 the six municipalities in Ontario's Hamilton-Wentworth region were locked in a divisive battle over their upcoming amalgamation. Yet in the middle of this fractious debate, these communities emerged as the most active participants in *Our Millennium*, registering more millennium projects than any other community in the country.

When the national registry closed on Dec. 31, 2000, the new City of Hamilton had recorded 1,175 millennium gifts – almost 18% of the national total. But the numbers only tell half the story.

*Our Millennium Hamilton-Wentworth* mobilized its community in the true sense of the word. It captured the attention and imagination of literally thousands of citizens. And now, even though the program is over, the learning continues.

**“We really wanted to reach out to as many people as possible. This wasn't just about the number of projects. This was about building our community and making it stronger.”**

-Betty Muggah  
Coordinator, *Our Millennium*  
*Hamilton-Wentworth*

As one organizer said, “It was not only a matter of what we could deliver, but of what we could learn from it.”

For instance, The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth is currently completing its own analysis of the project's success to uncover and share its potential for long-term, community learning.

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### HAMILTON'S STORY

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*Our Millennium Hamilton-Wentworth* set three goals for their program:

- 1) **Build social capital** by registering 2,000 gifts, increasing volunteer participation and encouraging new philanthropic contributions
- 2) **Understand the changing nature of our community** by reaching out and providing opportunities for everyone in our community to learn about, and participate in, *Our Millennium*
- 3) **Create new opportunities for dialogue and partnerships** by fostering discussion and new perceptions about our community, and facilitating the development of partnerships within and across various sectors

Here's what they achieved:

- Recruited approximately 100 volunteers and 40 youth volunteers
- Created approximately 70 new partnerships

- Delivered more than 800 presentations (staff and volunteers)
- Featured in 300 print articles and received 110 news/program references on radio and television
- Received free air time and ad space for at least 1,000 public service announcements in print, radio and television

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## HOW DID THEY DO IT?

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As with many ‘model’ projects, *Our Millennium Hamilton-Wentworth* owes its success to a distinctive mixture of strong planning, an effective partnership, extraordinary people, adequate resources – and a bit of good luck!

### LAYING A SOLID FOUNDATION

#### ***Partnering With the Volunteer Centre***

Partnering with the Volunteer Centre of Hamilton & District was one of the first – and perhaps best – moves made by the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF) in its local *Our Millennium* planning.

“Collaboration is one of our core values,” says Foundation CEO Carolyn Milne. “We decided early on that this was a great opportunity to identify a partner whose mission fit with the program’s ultimate goal and whose internal capacity would grow as a result.”

**“We are in the ‘Century of Collaboration.’ I really believe that organizations looking at opportunities through the lens of autonomy and individual success are not going to last very long.”**

-Carolyn Milne  
CEO, Hamilton Community Foundation

“We’ve always looked upon volunteering as a kind of gift to the community,” says Liz Weaver, the Volunteer Centre’s Executive Director. “We asked ourselves if we wanted to let someone else deliver that message or if we wanted to be front and centre.”

The two organizations, met, talked and hammered out an agreement. *Our Millennium Hamilton-Wentworth* immediately became a joint initiative, doubling its power and its potential because it was backed by two organizations, two boards, and had two community leaders championing the initiative.

The partnership was grounded in a comprehensive Partnership Agreement that clearly articulated the values, principles, roles and responsibilities that each partner brought to the project. This up-front work paved the way for clear communication and effective joint planning, implementation and evaluation.

The program would be funded by the community foundation and operated out of the volunteer centre, which provided staff support, an extensive volunteer network, and office equipment such as computers, telephones, photocopying, etc.

### ***Hiring a Project Manager***

Both partners knew they needed an extraordinary individual to manage *Our Millennium* – someone with an unbeatable network and a long history in the Hamilton region.

Rather than screen applicants through traditional interviews, they chose a more challenging process, one that matched the project's significance. Applicants were asked to submit a plan for the project and make a presentation to the *Our Millennium* hiring committee.

As a result, when Betty Muggah was hired she already had a roadmap in place, an approach that had been approved by both *Our Millennium* partners. It was a critical timesaver in a campaign that had to hit the ground running.

### ***Committing the Resources***

Early estimates assumed that a local *Our Millennium* campaign would cost about \$250,000. "We said if we're going to do this, it's got to be first rate," recalls HCF's Carolyn Milne.

At the beginning of the project, HCF's Board of Directors made a landmark decision – HCF would underwrite the project in case other resources couldn't be found. That meant the project would be staffed, full-time, for the 18-month duration of *Our Millennium*.

"This made a huge difference to the project," says Vincie Travale, an HCF board member and community champion for *Our Millennium Hamilton-Wentworth*. "We were able to focus our energies on the project right away, rather than worrying about money."

In the end, Hamilton used a CFC grant as seed funding and applied for other grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and Mainstreet Ontario. The team raised \$175,000 and leveraged almost \$500,000 of in-kind donations.

## **CREATING A NETWORK**

You can't reach a community as large and diverse as Hamilton with one person or one team. Hamilton took an organized and methodical approach to building – and constantly expanding – its network of supporters and participants.

"We were looking for people who were connectors in their communities," says Betty Muggah. "People who could help us engage different sectors."

Here's how Hamilton built its network:

### ***Enlisting Board Participation***

Board members of both HCF and the Volunteer Centre strongly endorsed and actively participated in *Our Millennium*, as did their CEO and Executive Director.

“This was not just an ordinary project,” says Muggah. “We were asking people for their participation, their networks and their contacts.”

### ***Identifying a Community Champion***

Vincenza Travale is a fixture in Hamilton’s community life. A former superintendent of education, the HCF board member co-organized Hamilton’s 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary and has more than 30 years of voluntary history.

**“Traditionally we look to the corporate sector for champions, but there are champions in other sectors as well.”**

-Liz Weaver, Executive Director  
*Volunteer Centre of Hamilton & District*

As the Community Champion for *Our Millennium*, Vincie was one of the project’s key organizers and chief motivators. She met with groups, spoke at meetings, and handled media interviews. She brought experience and profile to the campaign – and, of course, her own well-developed network of contacts.

For instance, the steering committee set a goal of 50% participation for Hamilton’s school system. With Vincie’s experience in the education system, the goal was achieved and eventually surpassed.

### ***Creating a Steering Committee***

A 22-person committee of well-connected community leaders – who represented the project’s target audiences – was created to expand the network and keep the project on track. Every member of this committee was charged with introducing *Our Millennium* to their personal/professional network.

### ***Working with Community Leaders***

Early in the project’s planning stages, an invitation-only breakfast was held for approximately 100 community leaders. This provided a personal opportunity to explain *Our Millennium’s* vision and ask the community’s established network to champion the project within their group and/or sector.

### ***Committing to Monthly Meetings***

Once a month both partners got together to review the project’s progress and make any required decisions. This executive committee oversaw the project and ‘tweaked’ its strategy as necessary. The committee consisted of HCF’s CEO, the Executive Director of the Volunteer Centre, the project’s Community Champion and its project coordinator.

## **DEVELOPING A PLAN**

While Hamilton was building a network that would extend and broaden its reach, it was also creating an action plan to focus on and achieve its goals.

### ***Feasibility Study***

Months before *Our Millennium* was officially launched HCF conducted its own feasibility study for the project. They contacted many of the community leaders who

would be participating in *Our Millennium* and asked for their opinions and ideas, knowing that these groups would be key players in the project's success.

### ***Defining Target Audiences***

Hamilton created a list of 22 target audiences – community partners like schools, labour, the arts, municipal representatives, and media – organizations, companies and groups that would be crucial to the program's success.

### ***Developing Sector Strategies***

Different sectors and different geographic areas demanded their own individual action plans.

Members of the steering committee joined smaller planning teams, such as the corporate outreach committee or municipal advisory groups, to develop individual plans to reach specific target audiences.

**“We put together an advisory committee right away and went to the stakeholders who would be participating in the project and said ‘What do you think?’”**

-Carolyn Milne  
CEO, Hamilton Community Foundation

### ***Tracking Progress***

Betty Muggah kept track of every group contacted by *Our Millennium's* growing network on a detailed database. She knew which organizations were contacted by board members, steering committee participants or other partners, what kind of information they had received, when presentations were scheduled, and what kind of follow-up was needed.

The database made it easy to check on a target audience to see who needed more time and effort. It also made last-minute gift registration easier at the end of the program.

### ***Creating Momentum***

As the plan and network were being developed, project organizers were also on the lookout for *Our Millennium* projects that could be recorded immediately. They wanted to create a critical mass of participants quickly and establish a list of stories that would inspire others to get involved.

One project – the creation of an *Our Millennium* theme song – became a rallying cry at both the local and national level. Jude Johnson is known as Hamilton's ambassador of music. She heard about *Our Millennium* four days before Hamilton's local launch and spent the weekend penning and recording an anthem that captured the emotion and intent of the program.

### **COMMITTING TO COMMUNICATIONS**

If Hamilton's network of supporters provided a launching pad for *Our Millennium*, the community's millennium projects provided it with rocket fuel. Organizers knew those stories packed a punch and were determined to use them to inspire others.

**“I learned just how powerful stories can be... I call it the Year of Goosebumps.”**

-Liz Weaver, Executive Director  
Volunteer Centre of Hamilton &  
District

### ***Hiring a Communications Co-ordinator***

Telling stories takes time. Hamilton chose to channel its resources into hiring a communications person full-time – a move that made the following story-telling activities possible:

- weekly media releases
- weekly columns for community papers
- weekly columns for the daily newspaper
- weekly radio interviews with a popular morning host

Each initiative focused on finding and telling the community's most recent *Our Millennium* stories. These regular opportunities also allowed organizers to highlight target audiences that needed a pat on the back or an extra boost. Project participants were interviewed on radio or photographed in the paper. After a while people were calling to find out how their project could become part of the next story-telling session.

### ***Using Existing Events***

Community events were a great opportunity to tell the *Our Millennium* story and Hamilton piggybacked on existing events as much as possible.

For example the city's annual Girl Guide and Scout Parade attracts up to 10,000 young people and felt like a great match for *Our Millennium*. By working with the event's organizers, *Our Millennium* was able to influence the event's transformation into a millennium parade. The goal? To collect 2,000 pounds of pennies!!

**“Your leaders have to have the passion and the ability to articulate the vision. They have to tap into what's already in people's hearts and minds.”**

-Vincie Travale,  
Community Champion  
*Our Millennium Hamilton-*  
*Wentworth*

The project's Community Champion was asked to be the event's honorary chair and *Our Millennium* flags were flown during the march through downtown streets.

### ***Recognizing Participants***

*Our Millennium* also organized a series of recognition events throughout the program. Rather than wait until the end of *Our Millennium* to celebrate, Hamilton decided to use community recognition as an incentive to encourage participation.

People who registered millennium projects were invited to a thank-you celebration in February 2000, complete with food, music and *Our Millennium* displays. They were then presented with certificates and bronze medallions (donated by the city).

The first celebration was so successful that the next event, in October 2000, had close to 900 people in attendance. It was held in conjunction with the unveiling of a millennium gift – a monument recognizing the role immigrants played in building the city of Hamilton. The local MP, Heritage Minister Sheila Copps, had heard about the

first event and decided to include her own announcement about a heritage designation in the neighbourhood.

The final event was a formal civic tribute held in February 2001 at City Hall.

## **ENLISTING MEDIA SUPPORT**

Hamilton wasn't looking for occasional coverage of *Our Millennium* from its local media; it approached news organizations with the same expectations it brought to schools or arts organizations.

Hamilton wanted its local media to champion *Our Millennium* – to promote it among its network of contacts – specifically, their viewers, listeners or readers.

Meetings were arranged with editors, news directors and on-air personalities. The host of a popular radio show loved the *Our Millennium* concept so much he immediately offered a weekly interview on his show to promote the program.

Community papers agreed to accept weekly articles and a member of *Our Millennium's* steering contacted a section editor at "The Hamilton Spectator" and helped arrange a meeting with the paper's editor-in-chief.

"We told him he had a chance to make a real difference with this program," says Betty Muggah. The paper ran a weekly column on Saturdays and regular coverage of related events and announcements.

### ***Finding People Who "Get It"***

It is the mysterious, magical ingredient that opened doors at every level in Hamilton.

Finding people who immediately understood – and appreciated – *Our Millennium* was critical to the project's local success.

Key organizers all said that finding "people who got it" was at the root of some of their biggest achievements:

- hiring the right project coordinator
- choosing the right community champion
- getting Board support for the project – and the necessary resources
- developing relationships with media

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## **THE IMPACT OF *OUR MILLENNIUM* HAMILTON WENTWORTH**

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Participating in *Our Millennium* created its own legacy for the new City of Hamilton. The depth and breadth of that legacy will be fully understood when the area's Social Planning and Research Council completes its current study. However, among the many benefits mentioned by its organizers are:

### **◆ INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNITY & WHAT IT CAN ACHIEVE**

The success of *Our Millennium* was shared by the entire community, because the entire community was invited to participate.

“The Hamilton Community Foundation Board has decided to establish a permanent marker as a legacy at The Waterfront Trail,” says Carolyn Milne. “This will serve as a reminder to all of the generosity of spirit that makes our community so special and a reminder that there is an opportunity for each of us to make a difference in our community.”

It gave the community – and the staff at both partner organizations – a feeling of pride and accomplishment. “It’s great to know that you were affiliated with this incredibly successful project and that you delivered!” says Liz Weaver.

The program also created a timely opportunity to reach out to new partners and volunteers, particularly with the International Year of Volunteers scheduled for 2001.

#### ◆ **A GREAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITY TO ‘TEST’ COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION METHODS**

The success of the program created some new models for building social capital in the City of Hamilton. For instance, the recruitment model used to create the *Our Millennium* steering committee – asking champions to connect you to different sectors – is now being used by the volunteer centre.

Both partners also learned about the importance of board involvement and the time and effort necessary to build a true partnership.

#### ◆ **INCREASED PROFILE FOR BOTH ORGANIZATIONS**

Both organizations said the community knows them – and their role – much better thanks to *Our Millennium*.

The Volunteer Centre also noticed an increase in the number of people volunteering for vacancies on its Board of Directors. “We had three spaces and nine applicants. And three of them were as a direct result of *Our Millennium*. They had registered gifts and wanted to get involved.”

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#### **A FINAL WORD...**

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##### **“We are in the Century of Collaboration.”**

*-Carolyn Milne, CEO of the Hamilton Community Foundation.*

Organizing *Our Millennium* reinforced an age-old lesson for Community Foundations of Canada: That no one person or organization “can do it alone.”

The question now is ‘How do we make that lesson part of our daily lives?’ Collaboration is one of CFC’s core values -- a principle we strive to reflect in our work and our plans for the future. But it’s a lesson that can easily get lost in the labyrinth of organizational planning or budgets or competing strategic priorities. Simple daily demands can blind us to the possibilities – to the rich array of talent and potential at our doorstep.