

Mom's Memory Preserved

Daughter wins award after raising funds for Aventa

SANDEE WONG
For Neighbours

Ten year old Christianna Wood Roddick has turned her personal tragedy into service for others – setting an extraordinary example of courage and philanthropy.

In October 2003, her mother, Cathy Wood, died of clear cell sarcoma, a rare and aggressive cancer.

Since then, Christianna spearheaded a campaign that raised about \$25,000 for Aventa, an addiction treatment centre for women. Her mother was the centre's Executive Director.

For her initiative and efforts, Christianna received this year's Generosity of Spirit honour for Outstanding Youth Philanthropist by the Calgary chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, during National Philanthropy Day Nov. 15.

"I am going through a hard time, but I think it was pretty special to do this," Christianna says about her fundraising.

"I was extremely proud of her and her efforts," says her father, Scott Roddick, who had been married 12 years to Wood.

"Cathy was a very philanthropic person, so to have Christianna carry on that trait, it's been a very good learning experience for her."

Christianna was also recognized at a private function for Generosity of Spirit honourees, their families and close friends, and organizers last week.

"I was standing there and I was like, 'Don't cry, don't cry,'" she recalls.

But here weren't many dry eyes in the room.

"You see a young child standing up there who's lost her mother at that age and is trying to do good things in her memory – it's really touching," says Kim Turgeon, Aventa's Director of Public Relations and Fund Development.

Christianna received a standing ovation by the 150 people in attendance, including Linna Morgan, Co-Chair for Philanthropy Awareness Week and National Philanthropy Day in Calgary.

"It really hit like a ton of bricks that this little girl was trying to do some of the work that her mother had been working on," Morgan says.

"As a fundraising professional, it's so wonderful to see you involved in the philanthropy spirit because that's what really makes our communities strong and ties us all together."

Christianna was not alone in her efforts.

With help from the school administration at Jenny Elliot Elementary School, Christianna, her friends – including Lana Waylenko, 10, and Allie Philips, 11 – and other volunteers were able to sell bracelets and raise money for Aventa.

"They all just pooled together and came into our office, and took a bunch of stuff and sold a lot of it in short order," Turgeon says.

"I just don't know a lot of nine year olds that – when they're going through the grieving process – would think to do that."

Christianna continues to participate in organized events to help raise awareness and funds for Aventa – that is, when she's not busy with her piano, swimming, dancing and singing lessons.

She'll also be auditioning for her second year with the Young Canadians in February.

"She did work on that campaign last year for quite a period of time," says Turgeon, "and now, she's more of an honorary chair."

Cathy Wood had been with Aventa for seven years. Since 1971, the centre has helped more than 15,000 women and their families to deal with addictions to alcohol, drugs, tobacco and gambling.

"Really, this (honour) is about Aventa," says Scott Roddick. "any way this could increase the awareness of Aventa – really that's what it's all about for us."