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Inspiration Awards Recognize Local Champions of Mental Health

OTTAWA – Six local heroes were presented with *Inspiration Awards* as part of the Royal Ottawa Health Care Foundation's Annual Gala tonight at the Congress Centre. The event marked the first time the awards were presented to members of the community who have overcome tremendous personal adversity to advance mental health reform or improve the delivery of services to patients and their families.

The *2004 Inspiration Awards* were presented to the following individuals:

Leonard and Gillian Wall -- exceptional parents of a schizophrenic child who volunteer their time extensively to improve the understanding of mental illness in society to help reduce the associated stigma and fear;
Richard Patten – a dynamic politician who was instrumental in reforming outdated mental health legislation following the tragic death of sportscaster Brian Smith at the hands of an untreated mentally ill person;
Justin Perkons -- a courageous young adult who has fought great odds to recover from schizophrenia and advocate for improved services specifically for mentally ill children and youth; and
Alistair and Sheila Deighton -- a rare and inspiring husband and wife team who have overcome tremendous personal tragedy and loss to become shining examples and champions for patients facing the challenges of living in a family where several members suffer from mental illness.

“These *Inspiration Awards* pay tribute to shining examples of leadership when it comes to tackling the challenges of mental illness head-on,” said Barb Corkum, Chair of the Royal Ottawa Health Care Foundation. “Whether it’s raising awareness of the need for mental illness reform among the public, helping patients navigate the health care system more successfully, or supporting families in crisis, these award winners are truly inspiring.”

“I’m very honored to be included in this unique group,” said award winner Len Wall. “It just goes to show you that anyone can play an important role in advancing the field of mental health to ensure more positive outcomes for both patients and their families – often all it takes is a little time and a lot of heart.”

More than 500 people donned their tuxedos and gowns for the Gala event, which supports mental health research and patient care at the Royal Ottawa Hospital. The Gala is one of Ottawa’s premier social events, attracting hundreds of influential leaders from the business, political, public, and not-for-profit communities. Now in its sixth year, the Gala raised over \$85,000 in support of patient care and mental illness.

Local comedian Jessica Holmes was the master of ceremonies for the evening, entertaining guests with the legendary wit that recently landed her a spot as the newest cast member of CBC’s popular *Royal Canadian Air Farce*.

The Royal Ottawa Health Care Foundation funds innovative research such as gene mapping of mental illness, the purchase of medical equipment, and specialized professional training for staff which ultimately improves patient care.

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For more information, please see the attached profiles of the award winners or contact Debbi Giroux (613) 722-6521 ext. 6767, or Kathryn Hendrick cell (416) 707-6665.