

# canadian auto dealer

## ALWAYS IN YOUR CORNER

Dealers are never offside when it comes to supporting charities



From left to right:  
Dave Duggan,  
Casey MacKay,  
Eric Lindros





# HEARTS AND SOUL

Auto dealers care deeply about their communities and many aren't afraid to dig into their wallets to help those in need

BY HEATHER HUDSON

Mary Nurse, (right)

**T**here's a reason auto dealers are often the first stop for intrepid fundraisers, sports teams and service organizations looking for sponsorship.

From one-time sizable donations to long-term financial contributions, they can be counted on to support their communities in meaningful ways.

There's no question that successful auto dealers are known for their generous spirits. And while they enjoy great public relations and stronger ties with the community as a result, most say their motivation goes deeper than that.

"I think it's our duty as good corporate citizens to share the wealth and give back and help where and when you can," said Bob Verwey, president of Owasco Inc., a Whitby, Ont.-based company that consists of several new car dealerships, a collision center, and an RV dealership and rental station.

At a time of year when our minds turn to giving, we're looking at how some dealers live that spirit all year long, why they do it and how they integrate it into their business planning.





**Harris Auto Group is a Proud Supporter of United Way!**



Thank you to **Harris Auto Group** for raising **\$10,718** for your local United Way. Your donation supports 49 life-changing programs that improve lives and build community.

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**GENEROSITY EMBEDDED IN BUSINESS**

Harris Auto Group has roots 60 years deep in their Nanaimo, B.C. community. Their humble beginnings have blossomed into four dealerships, an OK Tire store and a cellular phone business. Mike Harris, a third generation co-owner, says giving back is woven into the values of the business.

“Since my grandpa started in the car business in Victoria, we’ve always supported the community in any way we can. My dad [founder Tom Harris] has also volunteered his time to a number of causes, so he always sets a good example for us.”

In addition to sports teams, fundraising drives and community events, Harris Auto Group puts substantial financial support behind organizations like the United Way, the Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation, the B.C. Summer Games and Janecee Place, a temporary home for families whose loved ones need medical services in Victoria, B.C.

When it comes to selecting which charities to get behind, Harris says they consider what would benefit their staff and community most. “We’re a big contributor to causes like the Nanaimo & District Hospital Foundation because they provide services that touch all of us at one point or another.”

He notes that their efforts to give back, coupled with his father’s volunteer work for organizations like the United Way and St. John’s Ambulance, inspires their staff to be generous as well.

Harris Auto Group enthusiastically matches their employees’ monthly contributions to the United Way. And when employees choose a cause they feel strongly about, such as disaster-relief efforts, the company will often throw their support behind it with a fundraising event. “It’s just part of who we are as a business,” said Harris.



**POWER IN NUMBERS**

A long-time community supporter, Owasco Inc. often teams up with other dealers to band together and make an even bigger impact.

“A number of car dealers in the area have pooled money together to help build a cancer ward in our local hospital. We have employees and customers who get that terrible disease who can now get treatment right here at home. We’re proud of being a part of that,” said Verwey.

Owasco is now working with other dealers such as Nurse Chevrolet Cadillac, Marigold Ford Lincoln and Gus Brown Buick GMC, all in Oshawa, Ont., to reach the \$7 million goal to upgrade neurosurgery capabilities for the same hospital.

Verwey says his dealership also looks for unique ways to support the local community on its own, regularly holding promotions that benefit charities and holding events like community barbeques, toy drives and fundraisers in addition to supporting kids’ sports teams and school events.

Even though he views giving back as an important duty, Verwey is pleased to reap an unforeseen reward as a result of their contributions: more skilled employees. “We sponsor Durham College and the University of Toronto here in town to the tune of about \$50,000 a year and there’s a little bit of return there. We have about 200 people who work here and 30 or 40 of them have come from those schools. They’re skilled, driven and great at their jobs,” he said. “We look at endowments as an investment into our community and sometimes our business directly benefits, which is a nice bonus.”







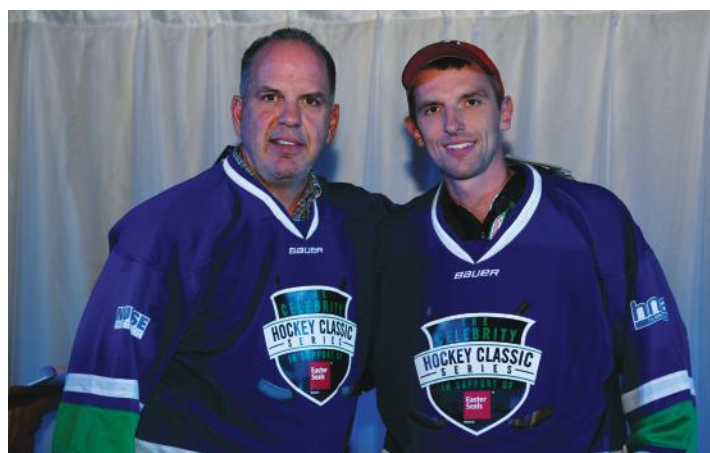
**SEEING IS BELIEVING**

Five years ago, Dave Duggan was asked to help establish a celebrity hockey tournament in the Durham, Ont. region to raise money for Easter Seals Kids, a charity that helps children with disabilities. As president of the Whitby men's hockey league and general manager of Nurse Chevrolet Cadillac, Duggan was well-positioned to help make this happen.

"I've always been a supporter of Easter Seals so it interested me... I took the news back to [dealer] Mary Nurse and she agreed to become the feature sponsor," said Duggan.

The Eric Lindros Celebrity Classic hockey tournament was born. Since then, Nurse has paid for 11 teams to enter the tournament and has been responsible for raising more than \$250,000 of the \$1 million collected in five years for Easter Seals Kids.

"Auto dealers are very generous people," said Duggan. "Mary Nurse, Bob Verway and Tony Willson [of Ontario Motor Sales] all allow their employees a day off to participate and do an excellent job of fundraising. This year we had a dealership-only division and next year I hope to attract more dealerships to play in these amazing tournaments."



**GIVING BACK IS MORE THAN JUST MONEY**

Auto dealers aren't the only ones in the industry that feel the pull to effect positive change. Companies like LGM Financial Services, a leading F&I provider serving 1,800 dealers in Canada, are tapping into the generosity of their clients to help further important social causes.

In 2015, they initiated Auto Dealers Against Distracted Driving, a dealer-led campaign to raise awareness about a growing and dangerous problem. "As a collective force, dealers have the ability to bring more awareness to a form of impaired driving that puts their communities at risk—both drivers and pedestrians alike," said Amanda Brkich, marketing manager for LGM.

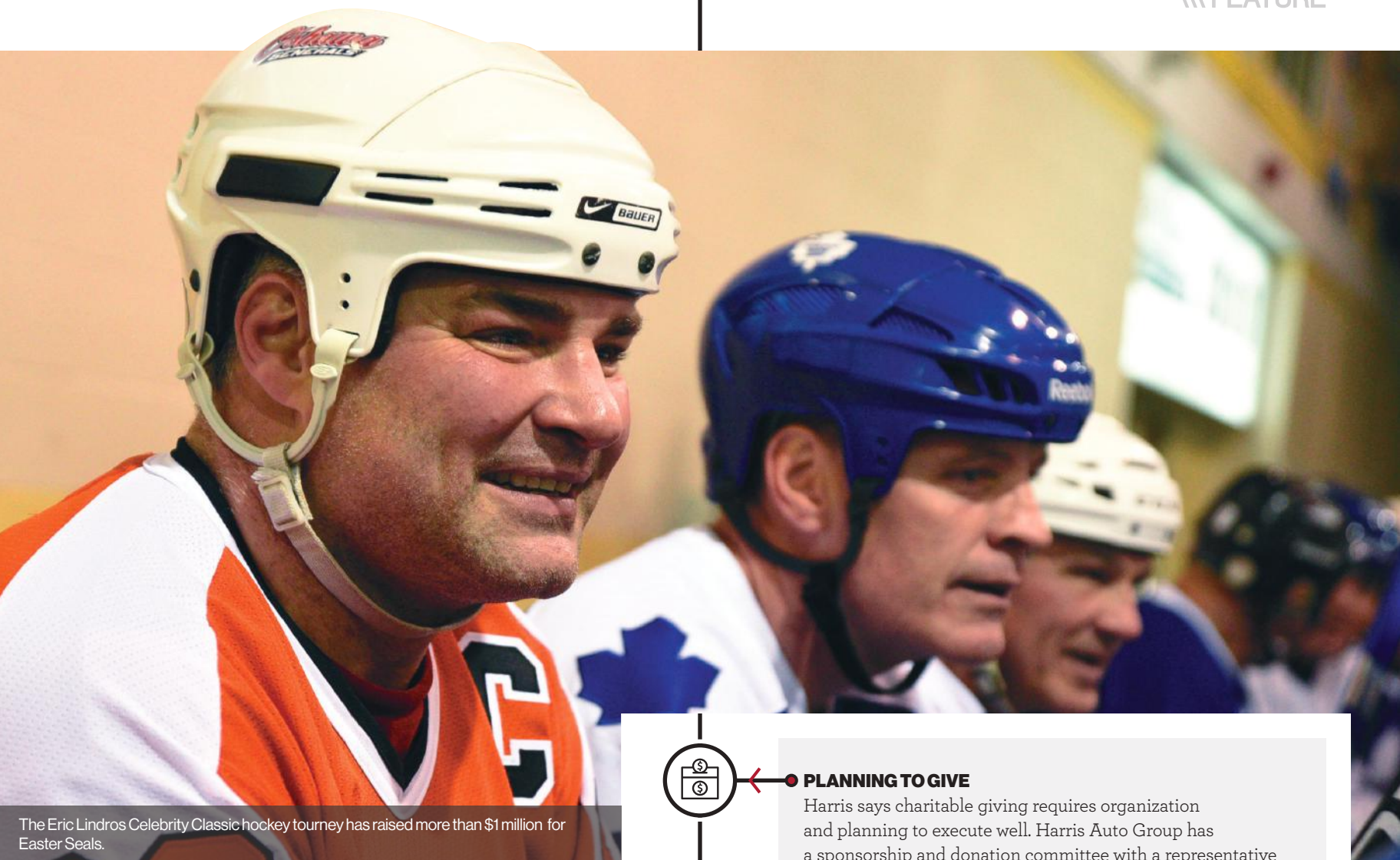
Throughout the month of March, customers who visit participating dealerships are asked to pledge their commitment to improve road safety by not driving distracted. "Dealers are in a unique position to help this cause by teaching people how to use Bluetooth and drive hands-free before they even leave the lot," said Brkich.

LGM distributes kits, which include posters, keychain tags for pledges and mirror hangers to help promote the campaign. Last year, 705 dealers registered for the campaign and received more than 4,000 pledges. You can learn more about the initiative at [distractionfree.ca](http://distractionfree.ca).



Casey MacKay, with Easter Seals, has a jersey autographed by hall of fame hockey star Eric Lindros.





The Eric Lindros Celebrity Classic hockey tourney has raised more than \$1 million for Easter Seals.



**PLANNING TO GIVE**

Harris says charitable giving requires organization and planning to execute well. Harris Auto Group has a sponsorship and donation committee with a representative from each store to help make longer-term decisions for significant requests. Meeting once a month, they collectively decide where to invest their larger financial commitments.

“We’re able to be a lot more intentional now. It allows us to budget for it throughout the year and make long-term decisions that have a big impact on the community,” said Harris.

It’s clear that dealers across the country are equally committed to finding creative and purposeful ways to contribute to their communities. Generosity is ingrained in the industry.



**ENGAGING WITH THE PUBLIC**

Mercedes-Benz Toronto Retail Group has been celebrating the holiday season with their communities for three years running with a popular toy drive. This year, the group is collecting unwrapped toys for children of all ages in their dealerships across the Greater Toronto Area for several weeks in November and December.

All donations are loaded into Santa’s Sprinter and delivered to the Toronto Fire Fighters Toy Drive, a registered charity that has helped thousands of families enjoy Christmas over the years.

“This important initiative showcases the passion Mercedes-Benz Toronto Retail Group employees have for giving back to the communities in which they live and work,” said Philipp v. Witzendorff, Vice President and Head of Toronto Retail Operations. “We are confident that Santa will be very pleased with the capacity and service provided by our Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and Metris commercial vans this Christmas season.”

