

# Let’s get really frank about philanthropy and homelessness



**Tim Richter, President and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Frank McKenna, Chair of TD Bank, and Tim Ross, Coordinator of the Community Action Group on Homelessness, at the Let's Get Frank Fundraiser for the Homelessness in Fredericton on March 20, 2013. Photo by Doug Mullins Photography.**

For weeks, the buzz had been building in the capital city about Frank McKenna coming to town to speak at a homelessness fundraiser put together by local community organizers.

The ads were in local media, the Facebook page was up, and word was spreading on Twitter. Even McKenna’s name was cleverly weaved into the title of the event.

Trumpeted as the beginning of the end of homelessness in New Brunswick cities, the Let’s Get Frank about Homelessness fundraiser at Fredericton’s Convention Centre on March 20th was expected to bring out the city’s power elite. Indeed the former Liberal Premier, and now powerful TD banker, delivered the keynote speech to a sold out room of mostly rich Liberal faithful.

At \$175 a ticket (or \$1200 a table), regular folk were left out in the cold along with the homeless. Sponsored by TD Bank, the high end approach to poverty fundraising, usually the norm in big cities across Canada, was now in little Freddy Beach.

“I wanted to go, but when I found out the price of the tickets it was out of my budget,” said Linda Ross, a retiree on a fixed income.

Some employed crafty ways of getting into the fundraiser because they really wanted to be there but couldn’t afford a ticket.

“A fundraiser for a fundraiser,” said Fredericton resident Doug Mullin, who started a crowdfunding site online to raise money for tickets to Get Frank. He managed to attract enough funds for two friends to attend. Mullin was also the event’s official photographer so got in gratis.

Others wanting access to the event volunteered at the ticket desk, worked the coat check room or ushered the tanned and fashionable attendees to the bar and VIP green room.

To be fair, it was a fundraiser after all, so organizers can’t be entirely blamed for wanting to squeeze the rich for a good cause, even if it leaves out others.

Tim Ross, a director with the Community Action Group on Homelessness and an organizer of the night’s gala, said, “We needed to tap into wealthy Frederictonians to start on really dealing with the issue...to ensure a robust response to homelessness in Fredericton.”

“It’s not elitist,” said Jason Lejeune, another gala organizer.

“The purpose was to invite the unusual suspects not usually engaged [in the issue of homelessness]. We wanted them to open their wallets to come to the event and open their minds after getting here,” he said.

Some in attendance wondered what they were opening their minds and wallets for when the main course of beans and wieners was placed in front of them during the fundraiser dinner.

“I initially turned my nose up at it, but quickly caught on they [organizers] were demonstrating that it’s a meal the poor often eat, and that the homeless would gladly wolf down,” said one prominent attendee who preferred to remain anonymous.

Others heartily dug into the brown mush because the meal reminded them of their own humble beginnings.

“Beans and wieners were a staple in my house growing up in Apohaqui,” said McKenna during a media scrum.

The fundraiser also celebrated corporate philanthropy, providing the evening with some of its more ironic moments. TD’s Brian Jones raised eyebrows during his speech when he proceeded to sell his employer to the crowd.

“...TD bank is one of the safest banks [for investors] and... number one in customer service...”

Jones later justified his remarks by saying it can only help the cause. According to him, clients who invest with TD were indirectly helping to finance the evening since TD was sponsor.

TD Bank has been the subject of protests for its financing of arms manufacturers, forestry companies that clearcut, controversial oil and mining projects and big pharmaceutical companies. Two days after the Fredericton fundraiser, on March 22nd, sixty people shut down the TD Bank in Asheville, North Carolina, in protest of the bank’s investment in the Keystone pipeline.

While McKenna’s speech earnestly highlighted the plight of the homeless around the world, outlining how many resources were wasted on luxury goods and military production, the clincher came at the end when he pledged \$100,000 of his own money to help the effort here in New Brunswick.

The crowd went wild, giving him a standing ovation.

Speaking to the media after the fundraiser, McKenna said, “I’m no expert [on homelessness], but I want to contribute because I believe it can be solved...I lent my name to this because I was moved.”

But isn’t this just the issue? We are all personally moved by homelessness, but solving it is not a philanthropic question. It is a political one.

The evening was in part a celebration of the philanthropy of privileged individuals. But the event was rather short on considering some of the policies that systematically benefit those same philanthropists while making life difficult on a growing number of others.

Tax cuts at both provincial and federal levels that have gone mainly to the rich immediately come to mind. So too do the cuts to services – like EI – needed to afford those tax cuts.

It is hard for most, however, to say as much when service providers are increasingly dependent on financial assistance from wealthy donors who benefit from the system that creates poverty and homelessness.

Fiona Williams, Executive Director of Liberty Lane, a family violence outreach organization said, “I thought it [fundraiser] was quite inspiring. I hope people in the room saw the need for action, rather than just talk.”

# Community Calendar

**For details and updated event listings, visit [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org). To list your event, email: [community@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:community@nbmediacoop.org).**

- NB Media Co-op Story Meetings.** Join us at our monthly story meetings in Fredericton where we discuss politics and current events and decide what to put in this paper every month. To find out the meeting time and venue, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).
- Kent County Frack-Free Speaker Series.** Tues, April 16, 6:30pm: Water Matters with Stephanie Merrill, Conservation Council. Donations encouraged. Contact Johanne at 785-4683 or email [upriverwatch@gmail.com](mailto:upriverwatch@gmail.com). Host: Upriver Environment Watch.
- Is Our Forest Really Ours?** Film presentation with Charles Theriault. Politicians, woodlot owners, maple producers and professors chime in a new film being made about forest management in New Brunswick. Thériault will be giving a presentation in Fredericton on April 18 at 7:00pm at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St.. Episodes can be viewed at: [isourforestreallyours.com](http://isourforestreallyours.com).
- A Child’s View from Gaza.** Canadians for Peace and Justice in the Middle East, Solidarité Acadie-Palestine and Fredericton Palestine Solidarity are delighted to announce New Brunswick presentations of a riveting exhibition of drawings by children from Gaza. A Child’s View from Gaza gives a child’s perspective on the impact of the 2008/09 Israeli offensive on Gaza. In Riverview, April 5-17 at St. Paul’s United Church, 404 Cleveland Ave. In Fredericton, April 19 - May 19, Penny Gallery, Charlotte Street Arts Centre, 732 Charlotte St.. Launch Reception: Fri, April 19, 5-7pm. Contact: [info@frederictonpeace.org](mailto:info@frederictonpeace.org).
- Les Hay Babies headlining Conservation Council’s Annual Fundraiser.** The Acadian indie-folk trio, Les Hay Babies, will perform and local eco-heroes will be celebrated at the Conservation Council’s annual fundraiser on Sat., April 27th at 8:00pm at Memorial Hall, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. Featuring an auction, appetizers, live painting by Tom Smith, music by Chambers McLean and Les Hay Babies. Tickets: \$35 for CCNB members; \$40 for non-members; \$20 for students. Sponsored by Picaroons. To reserve/buy tickets, contact [info@ccnbaction.ca](mailto:info@ccnbaction.ca).
- Cinema Politica** believes in the power of art to not only entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica is the largest volunteer-run, community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world. In Fredericton, films are screened on Fridays during the fall and winter at 7:00 pm at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. In Moncton, films are screened the first Monday of the month at 7:00 pm at the United Way Boardroom, Suite T210, 22 Church St. In Sackville, films are screened monthly on Wednesdays at 7:30pm at Mount Allison University. Check out film schedules of the locals or start your own chapter at: [cinemapolitica.org](http://cinemapolitica.org).

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# Tuition protest

(continued from page 1) ...of their need to pay off debt. They want meaning to their work, to build a more equal and just world," says Melanson.

A recent Community Foundations of Canada survey notes that youth are competing with baby boomers affected by the latest economic recession who are being forced to delay retirement. Many boomers hold 20 more years of work experience than youth. The mature workers are also competing with the youth who are just starting out and will accept lower wages.

Emily Dickison is a recent Bachelor of Applied Arts graduate of the University of New Brunswick who is concerned about the lack of employment opportunities for youth.

"There are so many overqualified people, so it is extremely hard for someone fresh out of school to get even an interview for a decent paying job," says Dickison.

The Harper government's overhaul of the Employment Insurance Program is also very worrisome for young workers like Matthew Belyea, a social work student at St. Thomas University and member of the Fredericton Scrap the EI Changes Committee.

"New Brunswick's youth are battling staggering rates of unemployment and poverty. This is happening in an economy where a demand for flexibility has created an increased amount of part-time and temporary work. The Harper government cut employment insurance benefits and promoted reduced eligibility while maintaining premiums. These cuts force our young people into more precarious low-wage jobs before they can receive benefits, and are therefore another incentive to leave New Brunswick in the rear view," says Belyea.

The struggle for bread and roses, a slogan calling for fair wages and dignified working conditions for all workers, and the activism against unemployment and tuition and school fees has taken on different messages, strategies and tactics. According to Workman, the promotion of the collective memory of working-class achievements, the creation of venues to listen to and organize working people and the encouragement of the labour movement to be more militant on behalf of the working class are paramount.

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