

Search for a cure gives a hearty breakfast

GIVING BACK: The donors Marg Meikle and Noel MacDonald

By PAUL WALDIE

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The Gift: \$450,000 and climbing. The Cause: The Pacific Parkinson's Research Institute.

The Reason: To fund research and treatment of Parkinson's disease.

When Marg Meikle was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease 10 years ago, she and her husband, Noel MacDonald, knew they had to do more than just cope. They wanted to help find a cure.

The couple decided to borrow a fundraising idea from a local church that held regular breakfast benefits. Mr. MacDonald came up with "Porridge for Parkinson's" and found some porridge recipes.

"We had no idea how to do this," Mr. MacDonald recalled. "But we thought if we gave it shot, it might be something that would work."

They hosted the first event in their Vancouver home in November, 2001, making bowls of porridge for about 200 people. They hoped to raise \$500, but ended up with \$17,000.

They've held an annual Porridge for Parkinson's in their home ever since and now receive matching grants from individuals and foundations. Last year's breakfast raised \$160,000, bringing the total raised so far to \$450,000. The money goes to Vancouver's Pacific Parkinson's Research Institute, which funds various research projects.

The idea spread and there are Porridge for Parkinson's events in Calgary, Toronto, Fredericton and Texas.

The disease has taken its toll on Ms. Meikle, a former broadcaster. Her speech and movements are significantly impaired. When asked what the event means to her, Ms. Meikle, 52, said in an e-mail: "It means that I'm not just sitting around and waiting for a cure. I can do something."

She added that she is particularly proud of the many young people who help out at the breakfasts. The couple's 11-year-old son, Mac, has started his own fundraising effort, collecting coins. Last year he rounded up \$1,400 worth, which tripled because of the matching grants. "I'm quite proud that we are nurturing these budding philanthropists," she said.

Added Mr. MacDonald: "The real payback for Marg and I is that we've got a son who thinks that if you need to change something, you get out and you change it, and you do it yourself."

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