



## END ANALYSIS

# Good Will Working

by Laura Sullivan

On a cold New York evening in Central Park this winter, skating on Wollman Rink beneath a starry sky, New York Rangers forward Mike Knuble led a pack of pint-sized aspiring hockey players across the ice like a stick-and-puck-equipped Pied Piper. Off the ice, teammates signed autographs and chatted with wide-eyed fans—parents and youngsters alike. And at center stage, generous enthusiasts made spirited bids for once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and memories, in the form of signed jerseys and Zamboni rides.

The good cheer filling the evening was all in support of a very good cause, the Ronald McDonald House of New York City, which received over \$525,000 from the event. But the sponsor was a group that—perhaps unjustly—doesn't always inspire images of generous big fun: the insurance industry.

"Our reputation isn't great, even though we give a lot," says Walter Tomenson, chairman of Global Client Development for Marsh Inc. and one of the founding chairs of The Insurance Industry & Friends, who arrange the fundraiser each year. "These events show how much we want to help."

As risk managers begin to take a new look at their profession, corporate image has emerged as a hot topic. Indeed, a lot revolves around what the public—your clients, vendors, competition, even employees—think about your company. And as more firms realize the importance of connecting with the community, they also discover the many levels of benefit that outreach programs such as "Skate with the Greats" create. Sometimes, however, it's not just the thought that counts, but how you pull it off—planning and development are vital to a successful project.

Five years ago, the brand-new Ronald McDonald House of New York City was completed—a state-of-the-art facility, designed with caring attention to the needs of pediatric cancer patients and their families. But with the new building came a whopping \$24 million bill. The call went out for support from businesses and communities. The Insurance Industry & Friends responded.

Corralled by founding chairs, Jerry de St. Paer of Hudson International Advisors, LLC, Jeffrey Greenberg of Marsh & McLennan Companies, Inc., Michael Hegarty of The Equitable Companies Inc., and Mr. Tomenson, insurers and others joined together, competitors united for a good cause. They wanted to create a novel fundraiser, and when considering the options, Mr. Tomenson's Toronto upbringing inspired him to

think: ice hockey.

"No one ever really wants to get all dressed up for a fancy dinner of rubber chicken," he says. "We thought that an evening of fun and excitement with clients and their children would be a better idea. And coming from Canada, I've always found that hockey players really give a lot to these events."

Through the efforts of the group and additional sponsors, such as the Makkos Organization, which provided the skating facilities for this year, and LeRoy Neiman, who designed the invitations, this event gets better each year. Since the first evening, which funded the New York Rangers' Room on the Sports Floor of the Ronald McDonald House, proceeds from the last several years have enabled the opening of the Insurance Industry Floor and the continued underwriting of the expenses of families who stay in these rooms. And the sponsors' generous contributions mean that almost all of the money raised goes directly to the cause.

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The skate this year was an incredible combination of good will, good times and big bucks for charity. And that's usually a sign that everyone is working together. The key there is joining forces with organizations and individuals you know are going to work hard, and with heart. To that extent, Mr. Tomenson gives a lot of credit to the co-sponsors of "Skate with the Greats," the New York Rangers Hockey Club. Their straight-from-the-heart approach is explained by Mr. Knuble: "It's uplifting to see how excited the fans get, especially the little kids out on the ice. They were having a great time skating and you feed off of that energy. It makes you feel good about investing your time and effort."

The real bottom line for these projects, everyone agrees, isn't the benefit of good public relations, but the helping hand extended to those in need. "Everyone should want to be involved in something as special as this," concludes Mr. Tomenson. 