

Caching for Kidneys finds hidden treasure

By Chris Putnam

The region's very first geocaching-based fundraiser was a success this weekend despite unseasonably cold weather.

A charity event for the Kidney Foundation of Canada, Caching for Kidneys is the first of its kind. The idea is local: the brainchild of Melfort's Mary Dancey.

Diagnosed with p-ANCA vasculitis in 2007, Dancey sought an original idea she could use to help raise money for kidney research.

"When I had my kidney failure, I got back to nature for healing, and I'm still in the healing process," she explained. "When our daughter took us geocaching, I really liked the idea of it—how it gets you out into nature, gets families together, and can be done by all ages. And I knew that someday I would incor-

porate that into a fundraiser for the Kidney Foundation."

Geocaching is a relatively new, fast-growing outdoor activity based around seeking "treasure" using a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver. Caches—typically waterproof containers containing various items—are placed somewhere outdoors and their precise coordinates shared with others. Intrepid explorers enter the coordinates into their GPS receiver and follow the directions to the cache.

Most geocaching is done informally; participants simply look up a cache location online and spend a free afternoon seeking it out. Caches might contain small trinkets to be exchanged or messages from past visitors. For the Caching for Kidneys fundraiser, the concept had to be tweaked into an organized event.

Dancey's daughter Nicole was placed in charge

of that end of things. She arranged five different caches at locations around Melfort's Spruce Haven Park. Inside them were a variety of objects: face paint, craft supplies for creating a team "mascot," coupons granting prizes to the first team at each site, and more.

Each registered team collected pledges before the event, and additional prizes were available to the participants who brought in the most money.

Five teams were registered: some experienced geocachers and others completely new to the experience. It was a good turnout, thought Dancey, for a first-time event and for a chilly day outdoors.

There was more to do in the park that day than just hunt for treasure. While the teams were out tracking caches, other attendees were under a tent eating a pancake breakfast, listening to live music, bidding on silent auction items, and entering draws for numerous prizes donated by local businesses.

In total, more than one hundred people took part in Caching for Kidneys, raising about \$6,000. And pledges continue to come in.

Dancey expects the event will grow quickly in future years as word spreads along with enthusiasm for geocaching. She even hopes to see it expand beyond Melfort into other communities.

Donations to the Kidney Foundation of Canada can be made online at www.kidney.ca/saskatchewan with



Team "Chilled"—Tammy Hryciuk, Trenton Delveccio, Amber Labrosse, Philip Labrosse, and youngest geocacher Saisha Labrosse—was one of five groups hunting for hidden caches at Melfort's "Caching for Kidneys" fundraiser last weekend.