



CEO Sleepout makes big changes to launch 6th year

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Downtown Winnipeg BIZ CEO Stefano Grande says the 2017 CEO Sleepout goal is to raise \$200,000.

There is a change of date and a change of venue, but the goal of the CEO Sleepout remains the same, organizers say.

Since its inception in 2011, the event co-ordinated by Downtown Winnipeg BIZ has had more than 500 CEOs and community leaders take part in the initiative to shine public- and private-sector lights on the issue of homelessness in the city.

"We have our diehards... but we want to see CEOs come in, learn about the issue, engage our social agencies, engage the homeless community, contribute to this cause and get involved potentially at a deeper level in terms of supporting the 10-year plan to end homelessness (launched by a community task force in 2014)," Downtown Winnipeg BIZ chief executive officer Stefano Grande said Thursday at the launch of the 2017 campaign.

Returning for its sixth year, the CEO Sleepout will move its outdoor, overnight campsite from Portage and Main to a spot under the York Avenue canopy at the RBC Convention Centre and bump back its traditional September date to Oct. 26.



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Joe Roberts gives the keynote address at the launch of the CEO Sleepout. He is in town on the Winnipeg stop of the Push for Change campaign, in which he is pushing a shopping cart across Canada to raise awareness of the country's homelessness problem.

"We don't know what the weather is going to be like in October... (but) we're at the point now where the community gets it. We've been challenging our community to find solutions to end homelessness, and this is a solution. Whether it's cold, minus-20 or zero, our community leaders will come out. There is enough energy behind what we are doing that we are not too concerned," Grande said.

"It's OK to give our community CEOs a real taste of the cold. It is only for one evening, and our homeless community faces that every single night."

The last CEO Sleepout, in 2015, raised \$170,000 and brought together roughly 100 local CEOs and community leaders. There was no 2016 edition, Grande said, in an effort to better align the event with Winnipeg playing host to the fifth National Conference on Ending Homelessness (Oct. 25-27 at the RBC Convention Centre), which is expected to bring 800 delegates to the city.

The 2017 event marks the beginning of a partnership between the Downtown Winnipeg BIZ and the End Homelessness Winnipeg not-for-profit organization.

Thus far, 30 CEOs have committed to participating, and the call has gone out to 500 Winnipeg community leaders, Grande said.

Since 2011, the event has raised more than \$800,000 to support Winnipeg social agencies in their efforts to bring employment, access to housing and quality-of-life support to their clients.

This year's financial goal is to raise \$200,000 to hit a six-year total of \$1 million and "very quickly turn that money over to the community and help those people who are homeless but are wanting to work. There are lots of

people wanting to work," Grande said.

Thursday's event launch in the lobby of Manitoba Hydro's downtown headquarters featured a keynote address from anti-homelessness advocate Joe Roberts, whose Push for Change campaign brought him to Winnipeg this week.

Roberts is more than 350 days into his journey to push a modified shopping cart across Canada in an effort to raise awareness and money to help combat an issue near to his heart.

A self-described former homeless youth and drug addict turned successful businessman, Roberts said he is an example of "community investment gone correct."

The Push for Change website states Roberts hopes to cap his more than 9,000-kilometre trek by reaching Vancouver on Sept. 30.

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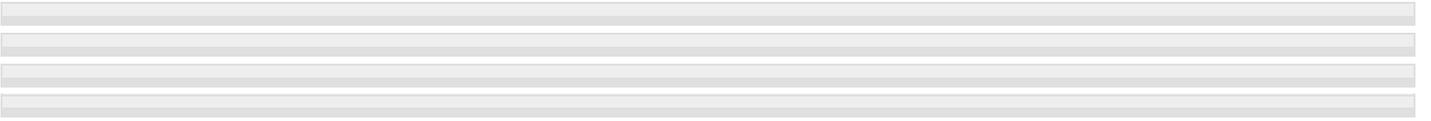
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