

Locals clinch top spots in McDougall Family Fund

By Sarah Sobanski

Two deserving community-oriented organizations will be supported by the McDougall Family Fund.

Local gym LiveFit and animal rescue agency Home Again Bancroft won first and second place in the McDougall Family Fund competition. The competition awarded \$5,000, \$3,000 and \$2,000 to three publicly voted for community projects as a part of the competition's five-year anniversary.

LiveFit made the top 10 finalists after submitting a video detailing its community kids' space initiative. The gym pairs with local community organizations and runs programs supporting youth and adult fitness in downtown Bancroft.

The contest submission video revealed the gym is planning a 'superhero themed' youth playspace to keep kids, teens and adults with special needs at its new location upstairs in the plaza beside McDonald's. It suggested the benefits for youth include 'improved academic performance, self-confidence, decreased stress and increased life enjoyment.'

The space will feature a sensory corner for kids with sensory needs including noise blockers, texture mats, activity cubes and more. LiveFit owner Amanda Stone said she wants the space to be a place in the community all kids can come play and be active.

'There's not a lot for kids to do' unless they're into organized sports or gymnastics [in this community],' she said using her own children as an example of kids who aren't interested in sports teams. She said there are a lot of kids who aren't interested or able to participate in competitive environments.

'But they want to do active things so I just thought this would be a great way to involve all kinds of kids,' she said. 'I'm planning on bouldering or rock-climbing walls' some small trampolines, monkey bars, ropes from the ceiling 'it's a playspace but also a space where kids being active, not just a place where they're going to be sitting around playing video games.'

Stone had applied for a \$10,000 grant for the space before submitting to the competition. She originally applied just to get the word out to the community of what she was trying to build.

'I thought even if we didn't win, even making it into the top 10 finalists, the community is going to know where I'm going or what I'm looking to do with the space. That always creates venues or opportunities with other people. And the video just went crazy, viral,' she said.

When her grant application 'fell through,' Stone said she was lucky to have won the competition funding. She said she was shocked when she found out LiveFit had won first prize and that the community really 'pulled together on this one.'

'Community has always been important to me. I want to be a positive influence to my community, both within and outside of my gym,' she said.

Home Again will put the its second prize winnings towards its efforts re-homing area cats and dogs. According to its submission to the competition, Home Again is the only organization to offer a year-round subsidized spay and neuter program for cats and dogs in the area.

'Next, Home Again wants to offer microchipping to our community at a discounted rate. This will be done by holding community clinics at various times throughout the year as well as year-round microchipping by appointment,' said volunteer and vice president for Home Again Christine Walker.

She explained Home Again started microchipping all its rescues last January. The \$3,000 will go to kicking off its community pet

microchipping program at Home Again's Pet Festival in Millennium Park Aug. 11.

Walked called the community ?incredible? for supporting Home Again.

?The support has been heartwarming and Home Again is very grateful to McDougall Insurance and Economical Insurance for their generosity,? she said. ?Thanks to McDougall Family Fund contest, Home Again will be able to hold its first microchip community clinic at Pet Fest 2018.?

Third place went to Southview Public School in Napanee.

The contest was hosted across McDougall's 32 Ontario branches. A panel of judges selected the top 10 finalists from 100 entries.