

**COMMUNITY NEWS & PHOTO RELEASE January 18, 2013**

## **Local Anti-Tobacco Champion Celebrated During National Non-Smoking Week**

*The Lung Association & Heart and Stroke Foundation honour **Surrey's Errol Povah** for his lifelong commitment to reducing the harms of tobacco use.*

A lifelong anti-tobacco activist, Surrey's Errol Povah is one of 10 BC individuals and organizations being recognized as a 2013 Champion for Tobacco-Free Living by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon). The awards, launched for the first time this year, will be presented during National Non-Smoking Week, January 20 to 26, 2013. (See [here](#) a full list of 2013 award winners).

Errol was best known in years past for his alter-ego, 'The Grim Reaper,' who would attend public events where tobacco products were promoted to raise awareness about cigarette makers' underhanded youth marketing strategies. Today, Errol heads Airspace Action on Smoking and Health, a citizens' advocacy group with whom he continues his tireless fight to put cigarette makers out of business.

Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association, cites Errol's resourcefulness and unwavering determination to raise awareness about the harms of tobacco use over the last 30 years as reasons for the award.

"No one is more committed, more generous or more passionate about tobacco issues than Errol," says Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon). "He is very deserving of this recognition for all the important advocacy work he's done and continues to do."

### **Errol Povah's story**

According to Errol, his career in anti-tobacco advocacy began in the backseat of his parents' car.

"When Mom or Dad decided it was time for a smoke, my pink lungs and still-developing body just hated it, and I made an almighty fuss," he says. "They both quit when I was 15, but as it turns out I was only just getting started."

Errol officially became an anti-tobacco advocate at 25, shortly after serving three years in the Canadian Navy, which further cemented his hatred of smoking.

"On Canadian warships at the time there were no smoking restrictions whatsoever," he says. "People smoked where they ate and slept. I'd had enough; I wanted change."

Fast forward 30 years and one could write a book about all the ways Errol has supported and contributed to progress made on tobacco use reduction and protection. Some of his favourite memories, he says, were when he interacted with young people as his alter-ego, the Grim Reaper.

"I would be wearing my 'Grim Reaper' costume and carrying a placard saying, 'Hey kids, please smoke'," he says. "They would get angry and indignant. That's when I'd take off my mask, and explain that the tobacco industry was subliminally promoting that very same message and getting kids hooked on smoking for life. Then we'd speak about why it was important never to start."

Since then Errol's passion has taken him around the world.

In 2006, he travelled to Washington, DC to join hundreds of protestors demanding the US support the World Health Organization's global treaty on tobacco regulation.

"My sign read 'Tobacco kills more people worldwide every 6 hours than were killed in the all of the 9/11 attacks.' And on the flip side, 'Sort of makes you wonder who the real terrorists are, doesn't it?'"

On World No Tobacco Day - May 31, 2010 - Errol set off on a six month marathon journey from Victoria to Imperial Tobacco's Montreal Headquarters then south to New York City. He travelled the entire 6300km route on foot, walking six days a week to raise awareness about tobacco use.

Errol is currently working to promote the need for smoke-free multi-unit housing and better enforcement of smoking bans around hospitals and public transit facilities.

"Enforcement is critical," says Errol. "If smoking bylaws aren't aggressively enforced and penalties not steep enough, people will never take them seriously."

#### **About the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards**

Winners of the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards are chosen by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon) for their long-term contribution to clearing the air of second-hand smoke, helping people quit smoking and encouraging British Columbians to stay tobacco-free. Nominees are selected by BC community members, public health staff and health care professionals. Launched in 2013, the awards will be announced annually during January National Non-Smoking Week.

#### *Scott McDonald, CEO, BC Lung Association*

"Recent headlines have many thinking the most pressing public health concerns are obesity, lack of physical activity or perhaps illegal drug use. All are important. However, the leading cause of preventable death in British Columbia is tobacco-related illness. We need champions like those we are honouring this week to help keep tobacco use reduction on the public radar."

#### *Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon)*

"We feel it's extremely important to honour and acknowledge the important work being done by individuals and organizations to affect positive change on the issue of BC tobacco use and protection. And we hope to inspire others and reinforce support for increased tobacco use reduction initiatives."

#### **About the Heart and Stroke Foundation**

The Heart and Stroke Foundation ([heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca)), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

#### **About the Lung Association**

The BC Lung Association, a non-profit, non-governmental organization, is dedicated to improving lung health and promoting clean air initiatives across the province. Through public awareness campaigns, the Association acts as an educational resource for the general public as well as those living with respiratory conditions. The BC

Lung Association also specializes in patient support programs, community services and advanced medical research.

### **Media Contacts**

Erika Callowhill, Director, Marketing & Communications | BC & Yukon, Heart and Stroke Foundation  
T 604.737.3420 F 604.736.8732 E [ecallowhill@hsf.bc.ca](mailto:ecallowhill@hsf.bc.ca)

Katrina van Bylandt, Communications Manager, BC Lung Association  
T 604.731.5864 TF 1.800.665.5864 C 778.772.4788 E [vanbylandt@bc.lung.ca](mailto:vanbylandt@bc.lung.ca)