



On Wednesday, GIFT Atlantic made a \$100,000 donation to the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador to be used in the society's capital campaign for the Shamrock Farm Centre for Autism. The money will sponsor the Teahouse Café in the centre, which will be run by the children with autism. Kevin Connors (right), president of GIFT Atlantic, was on hand to present the cheque to Trina Sharpe (left), vice-chair of the central chapter of ASNL, and Scott Kenny (centre), chairperson of the central chapter of ASNL, director of the capital campaign committee for the Shamrock Farm Centre, and board of directors member for ASNL.

Jennifer Pelley photo

Autism Society receives \$100,000 from GIFT Atlantic

Funds earmarked for Shamrock Farm Centre for Autism

By **JENNIFER PELLE**
Advertiser

This month has been a fruitful one for the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (ASNL).

The organization received yet another large sum of money to help with their Shamrock Farm Centre for Autism from the Grocery Industry Foundation...To-gether (GIFT Atlantic) on Wednesday in Grand Falls-Windsor.

The Shamrock Farm Centre for Autism, once in operation, will provide intervention services, counselling and training for people with autism, their families and professionals.

Earlier in the month, the society got two large donations from the Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union Local 779, the Labourers International Union Local 1208, and the Labrador and East Coast Catering along with the union members' families and friends, who made a combined donation of \$107,400 on Dec. 10 in Buchans.

Then, on Dec. 14, businessman Craig Dobbin presented a cheque to the society for \$500,000.

However, last Wednesday, it was GIFT Atlantic's turn as Kevin Connors, president of the foundation, pledged \$100,000 donation to the Autism Society for the centre for autism. The money will be given in three installments – \$25,000 was given immediately; \$25,000 will be donated in 2006 and \$50,000 will be donated the following year.

GIFT Atlantic includes retailers, manufacturers and brokers who first came together in 1999 to start the foundation. To date, it has raised approximately \$3.5-million for children's charities, all geared towards developmentally or physically challenged children in Atlantic Canada. The foundation was voted Philanthropist of the Year in Newfoundland and Labrador this year by the Professional Fundraisers Association.

"When (the Autism Society) held our telethon on Nov. 15, which raised \$132,000, we solicited GIFT Atlantic to make a contribution," said Scott Kenny, chairperson of the central chapter of ASNL, director of the capital campaign committee for the Shamrock Farm Centre, and board of directors member for ASNL. "It's taken a little bit of time, but they've been working on getting the funds organized and today is the big day. This brings our telethon total to \$232,000 and we're ecstatic about it."

The money from GIFT Atlantic will be used to sponsor a room at the centre for autism – the Teahouse Café. It is a room on the ground floor and will be run by children with autism as part of the centre's programming.

"It will teach them life skills, how to serve in a restaurant, that sort of thing," said Mr. Connors.

These donations helped the autism society reach its capital campaign goal of \$1.5-million to build the centre for autism.

"It was a monumental task to even conceive of this centre and we're now drawing towards its completion," said Mr. Kenny. "Our next monumental task will be actually running the centre with the programming we want to implement."

Mr. Kenny said the Autism Society has already started to raise funds so that dream will become a reality.

"We've been so fortunate that we have the infrastructure built to help everybody involved with autism in the province," he said. "Now it's up to us to move forward on the next project to implement the programs."

"We really need to thank GIFT Atlantic today for its major contribution. It really is their day. They're an Atlantic Canada organization that is doing so much good for so many people and now they're reaching out to the children of autism in Newfoundland. It's just fantastic."