

Million Dollar Neighbourhood leaves Aldergrove richer more ways than one

BY ELAINE O'CONNOR, THE PROVINCE DECEMBER 15, 2011



The Million Dollar Neighbourhood teaches Aldergrove families that the solution to their financial woes isn't as simple as money falling from the sky, over the course of 10 weeks of challenges designed to overhaul how they spend, save and earn.

Photograph by: Submitted, Kim Bellavance

As many B.C. residents start the New Year with holiday bills, more than 100 families in Aldergrove will be in the black after surviving a months-long financial boot camp for the upcoming reality television show, Million Dollar Neighbourhood.

But they have also gained something more important than money: friendships.

"It made a big difference in the community. We've lived here for over 20 years, but only knew a handful of people, and now we've made so many new friends. That is just priceless," said participant Annette Simpson, who has lived in the area for 21 years with her husband and four children.

"We learned how to manage our finances much better, and the legacy is the sense of community we have and we're hoping to continue small projects like the clean up. It's nice to be able to walk down the street and be proud of where you live," said the 50-year-old.

Filming for the Oprah Winfrey Network Canada series began this fall in the rural Langley town and will premiere on January 22.

The goal of the show was to increase the net worth of residents by \$1 million in just 10 weeks, by saving \$100,000 per week.

Participating families completed financial challenges — living on cash, eating at home for a week, searching for hidden money, giving up their car and helping neighbours find work. At the end, one exceptional family could win \$100,000 in cash and prizes.

Throughout the fall, the community of 12,000 hosted several events — a massive garage sale, used car sale, night market, entrepreneur business investor forum, and efforts to bring public transportation to the area — to help enrich the town and get out of debt.

“It’s a big social experiment and it was a huge undertaking to take this whole community and 100 families and challenged them to increase their net worth by \$1 million,” said John Ritchie, executive producer and partner of the Vancouver production company Force Four Entertainment, which was behind the show.

“It’s really timely with all the economic and financial issues that are going on,” he said.

Vibika Bianchi, vice-president of programming for Corus Entertainment said viewers “will undoubtedly identify with the pitfalls that these families face, from mindless spending to letting back-taxes pile up, to overspending on daily necessities.”

The 10-week series is hosted by Calgary financial expert Bruce Sellery and Vancouver-based clinical psychologist Joti Samra.

The company created a previous town-challenge called Village on a Diet, which put the northern B.C. town of Taylor on a health regime for a 10-part CBC series.

The series premieres, Sunday, Jan. 22 at 8 p.m. ET/5 p.m. PT and repeats at 11 p.m. ET/8 p.m. PT.

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