

The Cascades Club (affectionately known as “Cascades”), located in Chelsea, Quebec, is a successful not-for-profit community organization that has been in existence since 1920, serving the many communities of the Gatineau Hills, in West Quebec. Over the last 12 years Cascades has been developing, on its own, an active waterfront program which includes; swimming, a children’s summer day camp, and a community-wide paddling program offering leisure canoes, sprint canoes and kayaks, war canoe, outrigger and dragon boats. To do this, Cascades has been leasing a 1/3 acre piece of Gatineau River waterfront not far from its land-locked home base.

Based on a series of second-hand “found” docks, loosely assembled on a little patch of waterfront, Cascades has built its waterfront program entirely from its own resources, and has received no outside funding whatsoever from any source, be it public or private. Our physical assets include a limited collection of scrounged or donated small boats, 2 dragon boats that were purchased through fundraising efforts, 2 gardening sheds to hold essentials such as PFDs and paddles, an old “wedding tent” shelter equipped yearly with whatever old and odd pieces of furniture are cast off to the side of the road each spring, and a seasonal outhouse. But, Cascades has managed to inspire almost limitless personal sweat equity from volunteers, who collectively have contributed thousands of hours over the past 12 years. Thanks to these dedicated volunteers, we have created, literally, Something Special from Just About Nothing!

Our idea is to obtain funding to firmly secure our 1/3 acre piece of waterfront property for the long term, so that future generations can enjoy many and various waterfront activities on the Gatineau River. Cascades volunteers have worked hard over the past few years to devise, negotiate and facilitate a plan to secure our waterfront program, and we now have an opportunity at hand to enter into a 52 year, long term lease of this property. The required \$53,000 upfront cost of the lease, however, is very significant in relation to our limited means. We also hope to obtain funds for the hard costs of a modest shelter on the land to protect our equipment. A local contractor has drawn up plans (at no cost) for a small shelter that can be enlarged over the years as funds allow. We have many volunteers ready to donate the necessary labour to “raise the roof”. All of the pieces are finally in place and ready to be executed: all that remains to be done is to raise the funds.

The mission of the Cascades paddling program is to provide “excellence at all levels to all paddlers.” Excellence comes in many different forms, and we place a high priority on community-building through volunteerism, youth development, coach mentorship, and responsible environmental stewardship.

Our volunteers and dragon boats are booked steadily as community work-horses. Here are some of the things we do:

- Provide boats and coaches for 2 crews of breast cancer survivors (Busting Out and Pink Dragon Ladies);
- Assist with and support a dragon boat festival held as a major fundraising event for Centre C.A.R.M.E.N., which provides free professional services to sick people and to support their families (for 3 weeks in the spring our volunteers offer dragon boat coaching to all participants and we provide steers people for the event);
- Provide paddling opportunities to a group of Inuit students;

- Provide paddling opportunities to a youth group from Ottawa's Somali community so that they may learn about paddling, the waterfront environment and to enjoy the river;
- Offer our waterfront, youth coaches, and dragon boats for team-building events to local elementary and high schools;
- Host a sprint canoe and kayak regatta for paddlers under 18, with other paddling clubs invited from all over Quebec and Eastern Ontario;
- Organize and host an annual community dragon boat festival open to anyone in the Gatineau Hills and beyond.

In addition, Cascades offers a community-wide, much-loved summer day-camp for children, which integrates the waterfront and all available paddling activities. Campers learn how to swim, paddle and respect the river and our waterfront. To ensure the day-camp is accessible to as many families in the community as possible, we keep the fees very low, at little more than cost-recovery.

Cascades also offers a summer sprint canoe and kayak program. This program offers lessons and coaching to young children, teens, and adults. Our young children enjoy learning about paddling in a variety of boats; canoes, kayaks, outriggers, voyageur canoes, war canoes and dragon boats. Our coaches and instructors ensure that the children learn about respect and environmental responsibility through various activities including water assessment activities, water cycle activities and canoe camping.

For our more advanced development paddlers and high performance teen paddlers, Cascades follows a long term athlete development model ensuring our athletes are coached in a safe and positive manner. Our mandate is to develop independent, intelligent and successful paddlers and as such offer nutritional classes, boat repair and maintenance workshops, mental training and goal writing sessions, environmental impact sessions as well as year round physical training.

Our dragon boat teams are open to anyone in Eastern Ontario or Western Quebec, and have competed successfully in Canada and around the World. Over the past 10 years, we have had many paddlers compete with the Canadian National Dragon Boat Teams. This year alone, we had 10 paddlers competing at the 2011 World Dragon Boat Championships, and between them they won 24 medals (gold, silver and bronze). Our Cascades club crews have also enjoyed international success, winning 5 medals at various Club World Championships, as well as having fun, paddling hard, and raising funds for local charities at many local regattas.

All of our camps and programs promote a year-round healthy, active lifestyle, as well as opportunities to build life-long friendships.

To support and run many of our various programs, we hire local youth. In fact, Cascades is now the 2nd largest employer of youth in the Gatineau Hills, second only to a major downhill ski club. Young people work as councilors at the day-camp where they learn responsibility, and have an opportunity to lead and be role models for the younger participants. We offer a coach training program so we can develop youth paddling coaches from within the club. Through this program, they also have the opportunity to learn about boat and waterfront safety, how to respect and care for the waterfront environment, earn their boating licenses, and learn CPR and critical

first aid skills. Our youth simply love what they do! Last summer we had more willing coaches than we could accommodate!

At Cascades, we enjoy the waterfront in a respectful, environmentally sustainable way and strive to be good, responsible stewards for the proper long-term management of this section of the Gatineau River. Our children and teens take on responsibilities for the shoreline, such as clean-up activities in the spring and fall, and keeping the area clean and tidy through-out the summer.

Most of the waterfront is maintained in its natural state, and our plan is to use only 1/3 of the 1/3 acre property for our operations and equipment storage, which will be well set-back from the water's edge. A local organization, Friends of the Gatineau River, performs annual water quality tests at Cascades' waterfront and the results are consistently excellent.

The Cascades organization has created opportunities to enjoy the river for a diversity of groups and abilities: we have paddlers aged 4 to 85 years old, and in fact have a 20-person dragon boat crew consisting entirely of women aged 50-85 years of age. Cascades offers opportunities to young people who come up from Ottawa to learn and appreciate Canada's wilderness, and we have National Team paddlers of different ages and disciplines who come to train off our docks. Concurrently, many people are there simply to swim and enjoy the beautiful waterfront during lazy summer days.

Historically, the Gatineau River was a major transit corridor, and has been paddled and enjoyed by countless generations. It was a major waterway in the days of the fur trade, and up until 1990, the lumber industry used it to float logs down to mills in the south. The logs have been off the Gatineau River for 20 years now and yet Cascades offers the only paddling program on the river, and its waterfront is one of the few available access points in the Gatineau Hills to this iconic river. We see the connection to a great Canadian river as part of our national psyche, and we offer ourselves and our facilities to a wide array of people and causes, whose lives and well-being are enhanced by the opportunity to share in this connection. Cascades is safe-guarding and preserving the opportunity to access the Gatineau River for our entire community.

All of this success has been achieved over a period of 12 years through the passionate and relentless hard work of a small group of people, with no outside funding assistance. Now, we have created an opportunity to introduce some real stability, even permanence, to this gem of a community asset. We have built ourselves into a successful and socially responsible organization serving a broad range of communities, from Ottawa right up the river to all of the communities in the lower Gatineau Hills. A firm foundation is within our grasp, through the opportunity we now have to pay up-front the cost of a long term lease, to secure our little piece of land. Earning a grant from the Aviva Community Fund, would enable us to complete this critical step. Thank you for your generous support of initiatives like ours.

## **How Our Idea Meets Aviva's Criteria:**

### **Impact:**

Solidifying the Cascades presence on the Gatineau River will have a very broad and deeply felt impact. Because of its important historical context, and sheer physical beauty and power, the Gatineau River is the heart and soul of the Outaouais region. Navigating its wealth of fresh-water rivers and lakes in non-motorized boats has been an integral part of our region's history and continues to capture the imagination of all Canadians. The Cascades Club is the only available portal to the river that provides a full range of paddling opportunities to all ages and abilities. It draws people from Ottawa, Gatineau, and all the communities up the river, on both sides, especially Chelsea, Cantley and Wakefield. Securing the waterfront for the next 52 years will have a multi-generational impact!

Our immediate community - Chelsea, Quebec – has a population of approximately 6,700, and combined with the Village of Wakefield, the population rises to approx 16,000. We are tiny in comparison to our competitors in the Medium Category, and yet we have inspired and garnered enough support from all over Eastern Ontario and West Quebec to earn a place in the finals of this competition.

There is an urgency to raise this \$53,000 as there is only one payment option in the lease: one up-front payment of the full amount. There is no pay-as-you-go option. The timing of this competition is serendipitous, and Aviva could be our just-in-time Angel Investor.

Earning this funding would allow us to focus our community fundraising efforts on more tangible items, such as much-needed boats.

### **Likelihood of Success:**

The terms of the 52 year lease have been negotiated; all that's needed is to raise the up-front payment of \$53,000.00. With funds in hand, the formal process to complete the transaction should take a few weeks. With this payment made, the long-term lease WILL secure the waterfront for the next 52 years.

Draft plans for the simple equipment shelter have been drawn up and the costs budgeted. Volunteers have lined up to donate their time to "raise the roof" where possible. We will work with the Municipality to obtain the necessary permits and we expect that actual construction would commence in 2012. Once underway it would take approximately 1 month to complete.

As demonstrated over the last 12 years, Cascades has a proven track-record of successful endeavours. All of the pieces of this project are lined up and ready to go!

### **Longevity & Sustainability:**

The long-term lease would secure the use of the waterfront for 52 years! No further funds would be needed.

The equipment shelter will be robust yet simple construction (un-insulated and 3-season use) that would fit in with the natural surroundings, and would provide a solid structure to protect and secure our equipment, subject to maintenance of regular wear and tear. Annual maintenance would be carried in the Cascades operating budget and much of any required work carried out by volunteers. The Cascades organization has been in existence since 1920 and has a proven track-record of successfully managing its affairs.

Our plan for the shelter is to leverage any funding obtained from Aviva into something of greater value through volunteer labour. The construction will be managed in a “Habitat for Humanity” style, where volunteers donate time and skills where possible to erect the shelter and in so doing, become engaged in and feel ownership and pride in the results, which in turn, ensures maximum longevity and sustainability.

**Originality:**

Cascades’ waterfront program has built itself into something special from absolutely nothing. There has been no outside funding provided from any source; it has all been achieved entirely through volunteers’ efforts. Our volunteers have been trying to find a way to firm up access to its waterfront for years, and this solution has taken a great deal of creativity and collaboration to bring all of the stakeholders together in one negotiated agreement. We’re sure there are very few successful waterfront programs that do not control their own waterfront! The fact that we have thrived for 12 years now without a firm grasp on our waterfront exhibits a high degree of creativity and originality (not to mention dedication and commitment). The fact that Aviva has an opportunity to make a 52 year, multi-generational difference through one payment is surely quite original within this competition.

**Submission /Quality:**

We have included a video and several pictures to present the various programs we offer and to tell our story. We show how we began as just a small dock on the river and built ourselves into something much bigger, something that works hard for our community, for our youth and for the environment. Lastly, we show how we have done all of this with minimal equipment, no buildings, and not even a firm hold on the waterfront itself just a lot of hard work by a group of volunteers united by a common vision.

As with everything else achieved by the Cascades organization, this submission was a significant team effort with many people giving their time and energy! Volunteers worked with municipal council and our waterfront neighbours to negotiate the long-term lease; a local contractor donated his time to draw up plans for the equipment shelter; a translator donated time so that this submission could be in both official languages; there was a community wide call for historical photos to include in the video; our coach spent many hours compiling the video; and our children and teens worked together for countless hours to rally the vote: making presentations in their schools and to other community groups, preparing hand-outs and leveraging social media!

We would be pleased to provide any further information as may be required by the judges to further explain our Idea.