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Whistler Spirit Bear goes for \$50,000 at charity auction

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A Vancouver philanthropist surprised everyone by paying \$50,000 for a Spirit Bear sculpture at a charity gala auction on Tuesday night.

Indeed it was one of several bears the anonymous buyer purchased during the evening, raising auction-goers eyebrows throughout the night.

Then when Jeanie, the Whistler Spirit Bear, came up for auction the philanthropist shared a gut-wrenching story.

He was buying the bear in memory of his 29-year-old daughter who had died recently after a battle with an eating disorder. It was his way of giving back to the organizations, which tried to help.

"His daughter's name was Jeanie and he had come to the auction intent on buying a number of bears, which they did, and he asked if (the Spirit Bear) Jeanie would be put up (for auction) and he said he would come in with a \$50,000 bid right off the top," said auction producer Stephen Miller.

"His motivation was to do something in honour of his daughter but more than that he wanted to provide funds to children with disabilities who are in need all over the province and he is a true philanthropist."

The auction, held at the Westin Bayshore Hotel in Vancouver, benefits the B.C. Lions Society's Easter Seal Camps and House and the Canucks for Kids Fund.

In all, the auction raised close to \$600,000.

Miller said he was overwhelmed by the response to the auction of the 30 bears, which raised more last night than he expected to raise over the two month long



JEANIE The Whistler Spirit Bear, pictured here outside the Telus Conference Centre, sold for \$50,000, the most of any bear, at Tuesday's charity auction in Vancouver.

event which is being held around the province. More bears will be auctioned off in Terrace, Prince George, and Surrey. They can also be bought online at www.GoBid.ca

Gambier Island's Gloria Masse, who is well known for her paintings of bears, painted the Jeanie bear, sponsored by Telus. Jeanie is in fact a real black bear

whose life story has entertained Whistler residents and others for years through the columns of bear expert Michael Allen.

Another Whistler Spirit Bear Ursus Intrawestus by local artist Penny Martyn was bought for \$15,000 by Intrawest's Joe Houssian. He is to donate it to Whistler-Blackcomb and it will continue to be displayed on the mountain. ■