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### MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate delivery

### DEPUTY PREMIER AND NATIONALLY RANKED SKIER WITH BRAIN INJURY TO HEADLINE ANNUAL TORONTO FUNDRAISER

- Odyssey to advocate for over 50,000 brain injured survivors

(TORONTO - January 21, 2008) - Despite the frigid temperatures, local business, government and community leaders will shed their winter coats in favour of aloha shirts and grass skirts at Toronto's 4th Annual Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey. It will be held January 21st at Chega Restaurant at 3391 Yonge Street from 6 to 9 pm.

The first in a national series of 10 events in 2008, the Toronto Odyssey will raise over \$100,000 for the Brain Injury Association of Canada (BIAC) and the Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST).

It's no fluke that oysters headline the menus at these fundraisers: Oysters are rich in zinc, which brain cells require for peak performance.

Brain injury incidence rates are staggering: more than 50,000 Canadians sustain such injuries each year. In fact, brain injury is the number one killer and disabler of Canadians under 45.

Depending on the severity, a brain injury can have a devastating effect on a person's relationships, occupation, income and quality of life. Even sadder than these statistics and symptoms, however, is the fact that most brain injuries are preventable.

The Hawaiian Oyster Odysseys promote the prevention of brain injuries and raise funds to advocate for brain injury survivors such as former nationally ranked skier, Sarah Briggs of Mississauga.

While in her final year of high school in 1994, Briggs lost a ski due to rough conditions during a downhill race at Mount Saint Anne, Quebec. Her other ski then shot 30 feet in the air and she slid down the second half of the steep, icy pitch face-first.

Briggs underwent reconstructive facial surgery at the time, but continued to suffer from fatigue and chronic pain and found it difficult to sleep and keep a regular schedule. It was not until eight years later that she discovered she had suffered a brain injury during the crash. This diagnosis shattered her lifelong dream of becoming a teacher. Briggs still suffers from these symptoms, and has yet to find a career that can accommodate them.

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“My life has changed dramatically since that day, and my career path has been devastated,” said Briggs, now 33. “Meeting other people facing similar issues helps to keep things in perspective. I feel lucky most of the time to still be alive.”

Survivors like Briggs will share their inspiring stories at the Toronto Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey on January 21.

Confirmed special guests include Canada’s former Minister of Public Health Carolyn Bennett MP, Ontario’s Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman MPP and former Toronto Mayor and National Minister of Health and Welfare David Crombie. Tickets are available by contacting Adrian Lang at [alang@stikeman.com](mailto:alang@stikeman.com) or 416 869 5653.

“The Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey phenomenon has spread broadly and quickly,” said Shirley Johnson, BIAC President. “We launched the Odysseys in 2005 with a single event in Toronto, and we’ve expanded to 10 events this year from coast to coast.” Johnson’s passion for improving brain injury prevention is deep and personal; two of her immediate family members are brain injury survivors.

In just three years, the Odysseys have raised over \$300,000. This year’s proceeds will support such initiatives as a major survivor conference, a national resource library, and lobbying for new federal helmet standards legislation.

National sponsors for the 2008 Odysseys include Diageo, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, TD Bank Financial Group, Bombardier, Apotex, and Barrick.

Following the Toronto launch, Odysseys will take place throughout 2008 in Vancouver, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Gatineau, Montreal, Moncton, St. John’s and Charlottetown.

Each event will feature stories from survivors, oyster bars, and tropical cocktails. Guests will also enter a promotional draw for two round trip tickets to Hawaii, courtesy of Air Canada.

Established in 2003, BIAC advocates on behalf of brain injury survivors, promotes prevention and develops national public information resources. BIST’s mission is to enhance the quality of life for Torontonians who are living with the effects of acquired brain injury through education, awareness, support and advocacy.

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