

YOUR COMMUNITY

■ **OLYMPIAN:** Gold medal rower says "little rowing clubs" are pillars of community

One *stroke* at a time

Adam Kreek shows off the gold medal he won at the Beijing Olympics to some of London's young rowers. Kreek was the keynote speaker at the London Rowing Club's Celebration of Rowing event.



BRENT BOLES
Neighbours

Adam Kreek had been rowing across the Atlantic Ocean one stroke at a time for 73 days when his boat capsized in the Bermuda Triangle.

"It was absolutely terrifying," he recalled.

It's an adventure the keynote speaker shared with the London Rowing Club for their Celebration of Rowing evening on November 23.

"I think it's important that we set big goals in our lives," said Kreek.

Kreek estimates he was about 10 days short of his goal of crossing the

Atlantic when the boat he was rowing with three friends flipped earlier this year.

"From an emotional standpoint, I'm very happy with the outcome. I still think we failed but I'm very pleased with what we accomplished."

The celebration marked a return home for Kreek, 32, who first learned to paddle with the club as a teenager before going on to a decorated career in the sport.

He won a gold medal at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 as part of Canada's eight man rowing squad before attempting his trans-Atlantic journey.

"This (club) is what planted the seed for the next dozen years of my life."

The event, which included a meet and

greet for Kreek's teenage fans, along with a silent auction, was meant to raise money for the organization.

The finals numbers aren't tallied but organizers say about 160 people attended and they expect to surpass \$10,000 on the night.

The group hasn't been able to capitalize on their traditional fundraiser – a race on the Thames – since 2006 because of problems with the Springbank Dam.

Training moved to Fanshawe in the wake of the issues and membership dropped from about 400 to 100 said vice president Rick Vantfoort.

"The club went for a real struggle financially," said Vantfoort.

But off the water problems have stabilized and athletic success led to the organization being named the club of the year by Row Ontario.

"This has been a banner year for us," he said.

Vantfoort said that night was an opportunity to celebrate that success and excite club members about the future.

"Knowing what we've done in the past makes you want to keep going," he said.

Vantfoort hopes that in the coming years the club can give back and be more visible in supporting London through charity events.

"That's another great value to instill in your youth rowers as well – that there's more than rowing out there," he said.

It's a sentiment Kreek supports.

"Little rowing clubs and sports clubs like this, I believe, are pillars of communities. They're what hold us together. They bring meaning and purpose," said Kreek. "I'm a big believer in that community aspect of sport."



Olympic gold medalist Adam Kreek speaks to aspiring rowers before the London Rowing Club's Celebration of Rowing event.