



Matt Damon returns to Toronto to host star studded children's benefit gala

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By Lauren La Rose

TORONTO (CP) _ Actor Matt Damon will return to Toronto in September to take on hosting duties for the second consecutive year at the star-studded One X One children's charity benefit gala.

The Oscar winner will headline the third annual event, which raises money for domestic and global charities, on Sept. 9 at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, organizers said Thursday.

Joelle Berdugo Adler, founder of the One X One Foundation, said organizers have known since last year that Damon would return as host.

``We're hoping he'll be back as many times as he wants to be back," she said in an interview Thursday.

``He looks at this as an event that really he's a very integral part (of), and almost his event, so we're excited about that."

Grammy Award-winner Wyclef Jean will take on musical leadership of the gala, which will include performances by hip-shaking songstress Shakira, Montreal singing sensation Nikki Yanofsky, the African Children's Choir and others.

Jean will also be honoured with a special American Express humanitarian award for his commitment to providing aid, resources and inspiration to his native country, Haiti, through the Yele Haiti movement.

Actor Richard Gere and supermodel and philanthropist Petra Nemcova will be honoured with the 2007 Difference Award, recognizing individuals who have dedicated their lives to fighting child poverty and suffering around the world. Also receiving the award are Phil Fontaine, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, and Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York.

Others being honoured at the gala include Charlie Engle, Ray Zahab and Kevin Lin, runners who helped raise awareness for H2O Africa, a clean-water initiative founded by Damon. They are featured in the documentary ``Running the Sahara," in which Damon served as narrator.

For the first time, the fundraiser will be open to the public.

Tickets will be available to American Express card members through the Front of the Line program beginning Thursday through July 31.

The general public can buy tickets beginning Aug. 1 by calling 416-363-8231.

All proceeds raised benefit the One X One Foundation, a charitable organization committed to fighting poverty and improving the lives of children in Canada and around the world. The foundation supports groups including Healthy Kids International, War Child Canada, Right to Play, the African Children's Choir and Spread the Net.

Berdugo Adler said the foundation is working on implementing a pilot program in First Nations communities, to be overseen by Liberal MP Belinda Stronach, to offer breakfasts to children.

The 2006 gala raised more than \$3.5 million, and the foundation has raised more than \$5 million since its inception in 2005.

On the Net:

www.onexone.org