

Vanoc, the Whore

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, June 06, 2006

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I'm not at all surprised that Vanoc, the Vancouver 2010 Olympics Committee has whored itself with McDonald's by endorsing their program to indoctrinate impressionable pre-pubescents through its new "nutrition" and "fitness" presentations in BC elementary schools.

First of all, globally and locally, McDonald's exploits minors as workers. They contribute to the destruction of the environment with their beef heavy menu. Their food is unhealthy, although marketing has told them to act more healthy with more healthy menu items lately. Their advertising preys on children's lack of critical thinking capacity to guilt or nag their parents into consuming garbage food [sic] at McDonald's.

A whoring organization by nature, Vanoc is in charge of exploiting the Olympics for corporate sponsorship. Their goal is not to keep the advertising pollution of corporations out of public schools. Their goal is not to encourage healthy lifestyles or else they wouldn't even accept McDonald's as an official Olympic sponsor. And their goal is not to keep corporate funding crutches out of schools, crutches that justify further government cuts to education.

So, as an official, Olympic sponsor, McDonald's has vegeabled up its menu and approached the Vanoc whore to become sanctioned as a presentation provider in public schools. The fact that Vanoc reviewed McDonald's program and approved it as an appropriate sponsor to present the Olympic message is disgusting to me. The true Olympic message is not about the billions in corporate sponsorship or the facilitation of branding children with corporate marketing and funding. That's why Vanoc is a whore.

The fact that Vanoc says McDonald's actually providing nutritional information of their "food" [sic] is a part of "offering healthier food choices" is sickening to me. Knowing what kind of heart attack inducing garbage is in a Big Mac makes the burger no more healthy. The only rational choice upon reading what is in the Big Mac is to not eat it.

But in the end, Vanoc, the whore, is encouraged merely by McDonald's insufficient and incremental desire to be less toxic an entity. They fully support the fact that McDonald's is "really changing their image." This implies they're fully aware of McDonald's sour image. This also means that by trying to change, really trying, McDonald's has earned the Vanoc sanction as more leverage for McDonald's to get into schools--a place where they would love to permanently nest. And beyond the Vanoc seal of approval to go into schools, McDonald's bribes schools with up to \$500 in sports equipment for the ability to turn schools into pimps of their children's brains.

But yes, since market research tells McDonald's to offer more vegetables in their menu does not mean they care to really change beyond what local market conditions inspire? What kind of vegetarian menu options are there in McDonald's restaurant in the Texas and Alberta beef belts?

But in the end, McDonald's, like any other corporation that preys on children, wants unlimited access to the public education system. McDonald's "other" program mentioned below does pre- and post-tests of children's fitness levels throughout the school year. What an amazing concept. The PE teachers of BC should think about that as a basic way of evaluating children's fitness improvement. McDonald's has sure come up with a wonderful new educational program here. Maybe they should actually run BC's PE programs. Except for the fact that the first thing that a PE teacher thinks of to evaluate students' fitness level is precisely what that sexy McDonald's program offers.

So, whore away, Vanoc and McDonald's, but don't expect people in the school system to roll over to your bribes. Even though there are enough neoliberal, greedy, unimaginative or just plain stupid school principals and staff committees around, more and more educational stakeholders are catching on to your whoring game.

Ronald McDonald fronts 2010 Olympic fitness pitch

Darah Hansen
Vancouver Sun

Monday, June 05, 2006

Ronald McDonald -- the corporate frontman for fast-food giant McDonald's Restaurants -- is visiting elementary school children across the province to deliver a message of nutrition and fitness on behalf of the 2010 Olympics.

"The focus is not on french fries and burgers, but on making healthy food choices, working hard and being fit," said Renee Smith-Valade, spokeswoman for the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Games.

"We're fully supportive of it," she said.

The Go Active Canada interactive school show is one of two national fitness and nutrition programs being offered to elementary schools by McDonald's Canada, a top Olympic sponsor. The programs are only brought into schools upon the schools' invitation.

McDonald's spokesman Chris Stannell said that under the interactive program, Ronald McDonald is visiting elementary schools to "offer and promote the idea of leading a balanced, active lifestyle."

The presentation features video clips from Olympic athletes, such as champion diver Alexandre Despatie, who deliver personal messages on the importance of nutrition and fitness.

"We've really had tremendous positive responses from a number of principals, teachers and parents who are impressed with the way we carry out the program," Stannell said. "It's really focused on physical fitness and not McDonald's."

McDonald's Canada also offers a fitness challenge to schools through a second program, in which participating students are tested on a series of six exercises in the fall and retested in the spring, aiming

for an overall improvement in their fitness levels. Participating schools can earn up to \$500 in sports equipment.

Stannell said the programs reflect McDonald's dedication to "being part of the solution to health and wellness today."

Not everyone is as pleased with the company's involvement in schools.

Michelle Morton, whose 10-year-old daughter attends an elementary school in Squamish, said she was appalled to hear of Ronald McDonald's appearance last week at two local schools in conjunction with the Olympic Games.

"Since when did the Olympics equal McDonald's?" said Morton, who questioned the ethics of exposing children as young as five and six years old to McDonald's' corporate messages and logos.

Morton said she learned of the presentation through a friend of her daughter's, whose own school, Mamquam elementary, is not participating in the fitness challenge.

Mamquam principal Ian Kent said his school chose not to participate because staff felt it didn't tie in with other fitness initiatives at the school, not through any deliberate attempt to avoid the corporate connection.

He said the school was not aware of McDonald's' strong relationship with the program until this week, when presentations were delivered to students at Garibaldi Highlands elementary and Valleycliffe elementary.

Principals at Garibaldi Highlands and Valleycliffe did not return The Vancouver Sun's phone calls.

Seb Amenta, principal of Stawamus elementary, however, said staff at his school felt "uncomfortable" with the McDonald's' connection after they attended the presentation at Garibaldi Highlands, along with approximately 55 students, in grades 2 to 7.

"My staff, when they went, said, 'Oh, it was splashy. We couldn't help but see the Big M everywhere,'" Amenta said.

"The sponsor was definitely visible."

Amenta said the students who attended the presentation enjoyed it, and teachers were impressed with the overall message of fitness and good health. But, he said, schools must be extra vigilant about exposing children to corporate culture.

"Money can start to take over, and we can't go there with our kids. They are too precious," Amenta said.

Smith-Valade said parents can be reassured that Vanoc fully reviewed the program before giving its approval. She said Vanoc is satisfied McDonald's is an appropriate sponsor to help deliver the Olympic message.

McDonald's has worked hard in recent years to move in the direction of offering healthier food choices, including providing customers with nutritional information on the food offered, she said.

They are really changing their image, and we fully support that," she said.

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