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\$5,000 each for a charity of their choice

By Jessie Moniz

A running couple aren't just running for gold anymore they are running for cash for local charities.

Validus Reinsurance has awarded runners Chris and Ashley Estwanik \$5,000 each for the charity of their choice.

Mr. Estwanik, who works for Validus, selected Big Brothers & Big Sisters. Mrs. Estwanik, a teacher at the Bermuda High School for Girls, chose the environmental charity Greenrock.

"Validus is obviously interested in supporting Bermuda charities, and good causes in Bermuda," said Jerome Dill, general counsel at Validus. "Given that Chris works for us, we thought it was a great opportunity for us to support them in helping local charities.

"We took the view that that this was the sensible thing to do. We believe in doing what we possibly can for charities and Bermuda."

Mr. Dill said asking the Estwaniks to pick two charities, was the idea of Michelle Moore, the Assistant to Ed Noonan, Validus Chief Executive Officer.

"Michelle serves on the charity committee at Validus," said Mr. Dill. "Not only do you want management on that committee, but you also want representatives from other parts of the company so they can allow these ideas to bubble up to us."

Mr. Dill said he was keen to see how the initiative developed.

"We think it will develop extremely well," he said. "Chris is a member of the Validus family so I don't see why we wouldn't do it again. This gives us the opportunity to help the community."

But Mr. Estwanik said he didn't want people to think he was being paid by Validus to run.

The Estwaniks were both on the elite running Nike Farm team in the United States. They married two years ago and moved to Bermuda a year ago. Mrs. Estwanik is Bermudian. The couple made a name for themselves in Bermuda's athletic community when they lifted both the men's and women's titles in the Bermuda Day Half Marathon Derby in 2008.

"That is absolutely not the case," he said. "Ashley and I — our best running days are behind us, but we still love to be competitive and to run. We are going to do it anyways. Having the opportunity to be out there running, and helping a good cause is a win-win for everyone."

Mr. Dill said there were no preconditions to the Estwaniks being awarded the charity money. They don't have to win a race, or anything like that. "We think that their participation is good enough for us," said Mr. Dill.

Mrs. Estwanik said she chose Greenrock to receive her donation, because she has always been environmentally conscious.

"Helping the environment has been an important part of my life," said Mrs. Estwanik. "I was raised that way. Coming back to Bermuda, I always had it in my mind that I wanted to do something to help.

"Watching the green spaces disappearing in Bermuda is heartbreaking. I have been back for over a year and I haven't been able to put much time into helping the environment."

She said she liked what Greenrock was doing make Bermuda more eco-friendly.

Both the Estwaniks are part of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters programme in Bermuda.

"Big Brothers & Big Sisters has been in my family," said Mr. Estwanik. "My father has been a Big for years and now sits on the board in my home town in the United States.

"It is something I hope my kids will be involved in for years to come. It was an easy choice for me. We wanted to extend this to as many charities as we could, but at the end of the day we had to choose two."

Mr. Dill said there were four Bigs at Validus.

"We try to do whatever we can to involve the Big Brothers and the children themselves in the Validus family," he said. "We invite them to our Christmas and summer party. Whatever we can do to involve them in the enterprise is a good thing."

Patrina O'Connor fund development marketing communications director at Big Brothers & Big Sisters Bermuda said she applauded Validus and the Estwaniks for their generosity.

"The Estwaniks are taking their talents and really doing something positive within the community," said Ms O'Connor.

"So many times people do things and don't think about the next person. We appreciate any assistance."

She said the Estwaniks were also being good role models for the next generation.

"The kids see the Estwaniks giving back, and that is a great example."

Andrew Vaucrosson, Greenrock president, said it was donations like this one that kept small community organisations afloat.

"We have lots of activities going on at Greenrock," said Mr. Vaucrosson. "We have just been asked to talk to Validus Re about our green office initiative.

"We are very keen on introducing that, and we have 30 to 40 companies now who are embracing that. We also have some schools that are using our ideas.

"A lot of it is baby steps right now. Some offices are far more advanced than others. Rather than us expecting everyone to be on the same level, we are taking a lot of the information from those who are advanced and sharing it with those people who are just starting out."

The programme works to get people to understand what a green office is. Then it goes through getting people to understand the six or seven steps that one needs to follow. We offer a green office assessment. Primarily, it is about reducing an office's overall impact and to make a healthier office environment."

He said the Greenrock website at www.greenrock.org was fast becoming a community resource for tips on achieving a greener world.

"In this current economic situation, any contribution like this is appreciated," said Mr. Vaucrosson.
"Anything we raise is used for these projects."

To contact Greenrock telephone 747-7625 or see their website at www.greenrock.org. To contact Big Brothers and Big Sisters check out their website at www.bbbs.bm or telephone 292-2802.
