

CITY

Cancer survivor's big day a real doozy

Ottawa man beneficiary of conspiracy of fun

BY MATTHEW PEARSON

Judging by the surprised look on his face, Brian Doan wasn't expecting a guy with pointy ears and a red suit to be hiding in the trunk of a BMW.

However, that was exactly what happened to the Ottawa man Wednesday as his wife and a phalanx of media stood by to watch the surprise unfold.

"Nobody pulls surprises off on me," he said after catching his breath. "I don't know how she did it."

Doan, it turns out, was nominated by the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation to win a dream day, courtesy of a Montreal company that "makes dreams come true," according to its founder.

Experience Genie is the brainchild of Joshua Dawson, a 35-year-old entrepreneur who lost his own father to cancer several years ago

and now travels the globe to give people — in particular, cancer survivors — a day to remember.

Dawson — who, by the way, isn't the guy dressed in the red suit and wearing the slightly creepy silicone mask — has taken a New York woman for trapeze lessons and put a Calgary woman behind the wheel of a Formula 1 Ferrari on past dream days. Doan was the first Ottawa recipient.

"I've just always enjoyed doing fun, exciting things, and I thought it's better to give some of these cancer survivors or people who have endured hardship a day away from it all," Dawson said.

Doan's day included a chauffeured ride in a BMW 7-series to activities that included high-speed go-karting, cooking lessons and a visit to a spa. He and his wife, Heather Thomson, were also booked into a luxury hotel for the night.



PAT MCGRATH, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Cancer survivor Brian Doan's 'fabulous day' begins Wednesday with a visit from the Experience Genie, also known as Christian Eio. Doan had been nominated by the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation.

It sounded great, but Doan had one problem: He had told his boss at the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation he'd be at the office by 9:30 a.m. Thomson, he then learned, had already taken care of that.

"I'm very humbled by this," Doan said. "It's going to be a fabulous day.

Doan, 40, was in his late-20s when a small tumour was discovered on one of his testicles. By then, the cancer had spread to his lymph nodes,

so Doan underwent a bout of radiation and had the testicle surgically removed.

Since then, he has been cancer free and has dedicated much of his time to raising money for cancer research. In 2008, those efforts took him and Thomson to 11 countries on four continents to compete in a series of half-Ironman races.

Doan also launched a website called Nuts About Cancer. He says he wants to make the disease something men are comfortable talking about, and he even has T-shirts with a slogan: "It's all fun and games until someone loses a testicle."

"If I was going to get any kind of cancer at a young age, I hit the jackpot because it's very curable, very treatable and, if you do self-examinations, you can find it early enough," Doan said.

The Canadian Cancer Society says testicular cancer is common among men between 15 and 49. Common symptoms include a painless lump on a testicle, swelling of a testicle or change in the way it feels, pain or discomfort in a testicle or in the scrotum or a feeling of heaviness or aching in the lower abdomen or scrotum.