

Molson Rocks for Toronto



JULY 30TH 2003

In 2003, the World Health Organization put Toronto under an international health warning. An global event headed by the Rolling Stones helped steer Toronto past the economic and reputational damage done by SARS – and created a lasting legacy for Toronto.

In 2003, Toronto experienced a number of cases of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), and was placed under an international health warning from the World Health Organization. The negative publicity surrounding the SARS findings led to a downturn in Toronto's tourism industry. Although health officials were able to contain the incidences of SARS in Toronto, the economic and reputational damage had been done.

A solution was needed. But that solution would not simply happen on its own. Moreover, many, many partners would be needed.

That's when Toronto-Danforth Member of Parliament, Dennis Mills, and global concert promoter, Michael Cohl, worked with the Rolling Stones to create Molson Rocks for Toronto.

Dozens of planners collaborated, including the three levels of government, emergency service personnel from the GTA, the TTC and TTC WheelTrans, CBC, and

Estimated to have close to half a million people attending the concert, it is the largest outdoor ticketed event in Canadian history, and one of the largest ever in North America. It even featured the longest BBQ in the world, with vendors from Alberta's beef industry.

Also a first of its kind, more than 2,000 fans with disabilities — an estimated 700 of those in wheelchairs — attended in a specially constructed area near the stage.

The concert was organized in about a month.

The event opened in the afternoon with the [Have Love Will Travel Revue](#) (Aykroyd and [James Belushi](#)), [Sam Roberts](#), [Kathleen Edwards](#), [La Chicane](#), [The Tea Party](#), [The Flaming Lips](#) who invited artists from backstage to dance on stage with them dressed in fuzzy animal costumes, [Sass Jordan](#), [The Isley Brothers](#), and [Blue Rodeo](#). Each band performed for 15–20 minutes. The second part of the concert began later in the afternoon and lasted into the night and included [Justin Timberlake](#), [The Guess Who](#), [Rush](#), [AC/DC](#), and [The Rolling Stones](#), who performed a 90-minute set to end the concert.

With the global coverage the event garnered, and Mick Jagger's pronouncement that "Toronto is booming," the SARS stigma was over.

The 2-DVD set that featured performances by the Rolling Stones, ACDC, Rush, The Guess Who and many more.

30 Video Sample of SARS Concert

[Concert rocked economy to the tune of \\$75-million](#), The Globe and Mail, August 7th 2003

[Just Ignore the Whiners: The Downsview concert offered relief from the usual national neuroses](#), Paul Wells in Macleans, August 11th, 2003