

# Winners of the downturn

THIEN HUYNH

IN THE CITY

Tac Tran is looking forward to seeing the exclusive premiere of the Disney movie *Race to Witch Mountain*. A few weeks ago he was one of the first (un)lucky movie goers to see *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*.

Tran, a maintenance worker, hasn't paid to see a movie for over two years thanks to all the radio station contests he's won.

In fact, he hasn't had to pay for any concert tickets or sporting events either.

Signing up and winning various contests has garnered Tran tickets to the Auto Show, seven concerts at the Air Canada Centre, and platinum seats at a Leafs game (maybe he isn't so lucky after all).

All these freebies can go a long way in saving entertainment dollars during a recession.

"I win so often because not enough people apply. I'm not worried about extra competition. There are hundreds of prizes to go around," says Tran, who enters at least 1,000 contests a year.

"I think I've won over \$5,000

worth of freebies so far. But I don't keep track. It's a superstitious thing."

With the economy in a downturn, a freebie can make a difference in a family's budget. Carolyn Wilman, a.k.a. the Contest Queen ([www.contestqueen.com](http://www.contestqueen.com)), has made a career of helping people win prizes.

"You can win prizes to enhance your current lifestyle: Gift cards, gift baskets, DVDs, movie passes, etc. Or, you can win prizes that may not be in your budget: New appliances, furniture, a car," says the Oshawa-based Wilman.

"You can even win prizes money can't buy. My best win was a trip to England and we had a great feast on the *Harry Potter* set. My husband's best win was when he got to be a judge in the Miss Hawaiian Tropics Bikini Contest."

For those of us who are frustrated with losing (I still anxiously check the mailbox every week in hopes of getting my prize from Abu Yakubu Yama of the Andani Royal Family), the Contest Queen offers two easy ways to increase the chances of winning contests.

**Tip 1:** Always read the rules. A lot of people inadvertently disqualify themselves.

**Tip 2:** Enter, enter, enter. The

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PRIZED: Carolyn Wilman, the Contest Queen, holds court on the set of *Harry Potter*.

more you enter, the better your odds — especially online.

"I submit 100-300 entries per day to win 5-15 prizes every month," says Wilman. "You can't win if you don't enter!"

All these prizes are nice, but I

prefer to try my luck with two Quick Picks and an Encore — at least until my African prince comes through.

— Thien runs Thursdays in 24 hours. E-mail him at [thienh112@yahoo.com](mailto:thienh112@yahoo.com)