

SPORTS & LEISURE

Hardcastle named Hockey Heritage winner

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

It's a rare occasion when you'll find this year's Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award recipient in an arena.

And yet there likely isn't a more valuable person currently working within the Georgetown Minor Hockey Association, assigning game and practice times, while looking after registration for the organization's 1,800 players.

Geraldine Hardcastle has been involved with the GMHA in one of many executive positions for a quarter-century, including the past 15 years in the role as its ice scheduler and the last decade as the registrar.

"I'm the bitchy lady who gives out the 6 a.m. practice times, so I'm not very popular," she laughs.

"You just can't keep everybody happy. We only want to use arenas from five to 10 p.m."

Before the monthly schedules are inputted onto an Xcel computer program, Hardcastle painstakingly plots out ice times by hand in her home office, drawing information from binders and spreadsheets for the 100 house league, 10 select and 30 rep teams in the GMHA.

"We're going to begin the playoffs now and once that starts, it's like 24/7 (on the Inter) 'net," said the 51-year-old local native, who has worked weekday mornings as a Cedarvale Park nursery school supervisor for 30 years.

"You're on the phone or computer arranging games and the logistics of playing Chatham or Belleville or anywhere and you've got all these teams that you have to schedule in. It's trying, and then if the snow flies, you're screwed, or if you have too many Georgetown teams that make it to the playoffs, there's just not enough ice to go around. That's why I never get to go to the arena because I'm at home working on setting up the games. Even when my nephews play I don't get to see them, but I can certainly tell them where they're going."

Although she does receive a stipend for her GMHA duties, Hardcastle brings along her computer and hockey books on summer boating trips on Georgian Bay with husband Martin, who is a convenor for the Tri-County Minor Hockey



Her contributions to the local hockey community have mostly been behind the scenes, but nonetheless important work as Geraldine Hardcastle is the 2011 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award winner.

Photo by Ted Brown

Leagues.

"She's always been really good at working with the big picture in mind and not any one particular group— not just rep or select or house league," said Ron Lefebvre, vice president of the GMHA house league.

"Because ice time is in such demand in Georgetown, she's managed to keep programs going for the kids that we thought we were going to lose, because she was able to find the time for them. She was involved in the 60th anniversary of the GMHA and is on the committee for the 75th next year. Geraldine is very committed to the history of all Georgetown hockey."

Growing up in town, the Holy Cross student played a lot of softball but also spent many winter nights playing shinny outdoors on the flooded-out hydro corridor between McIntyre and Norton crescents, even skating alongside future NHLer Adam Bennett.

Her dad, 1993 Hockey Heritage Award recipient Jim Ford, would take Geraldine and her three sisters to watch the inter-

mediate Raiders on Saturday nights at Memorial Arena and travel to places such as Dundas, Welland and Dunnville for playoff games.

Hardcastle's formal involvement with the GMHA began in the early 1980s when Martin managed an atom AA team coached by Charlie Hanman.

In 1993, Hardcastle was asked by long-time GMHA president Hal Pells to help Dave Curry and the late Dave Martin as the chief organizers of the 10-day Georgetown international bantam tournament, which at its peak drew 120 teams from as far away as Mexico and Newfoundland over the March Break until it ended in 2000.

But her attachment to the bantam tournament actually stretched back to her teenage years when local girls would serve lunch and breakfast each day to the players at the Legion, although there were ulterior motives involved with working during the March Break.

"It was the big Georgetown event of the year," said Hardcastle, who has two adult children, Sean and Amanda.

"The boys in the tournament would be billeted here and it was a very exciting week. All the girls would break up with their boyfriends before March Break so they'd be available, and then when the tournament was over, you'd just go back to the old boyfriend."

The year the Mexican team played in the event was also memorable. After months of long-distance phone calls and uncertainty about whether the team would even make the trip north, the Mexicans arrived in Georgetown and took on a local team in a friendly exhibition match.

Following the game, the visitors were so thrilled about taking on their Canadian counterparts that they initiated a jersey exchange.

"It was a nice gesture, but we didn't have money in the budget for another full set of sweaters," Hardcastle recalled.

"What could you do? We found the money for new ones from somewhere."

Hardcastle later became vice president of administration for the GMHA and under her guidance the organization became one of the first to introduce on-line registration. She was asked by the Tri-County loop to be a convenor and soon the website minorhockey.net was established, providing frequently updated scores and standings on the web that the Ontario Minor Hockey Association has now adopted.

"My brother-in-law had a web-posting service so I sat down with his web designer and programmer and we came up with something that would work to keep track of scores and standings so it could be done instantaneously and we got great feedback from that," she added.

She now co-ordinates training courses and clinics in this area for the OMHA and helps organize the Tri-County's annual midget all-star game.

In 2000, Hardcastle had her hair buzzed clean for the Shave Off for Cancer and volunteered to help with the 2005 Dudley Hewitt Cup Jr. A tournament here, along with Georgetown's bid to become Hockeyville in 2006.

The 34th-annual awards dinner will be held in the Acton Legion on Monday, March 7. Tickets are \$65 each and can be purchased by calling Dave Kentner at 905-877-6710.



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