

Huntley, Beattie

From sports to

Santa Claus

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TRENTON — It's a tough-luck tale.

A drunk driver rammed into his truck in 1987, so hard that the top came right off the frame. He was two years convalescing and he lost most of the use of his left arm permanently.

Today, he suffers from a host of medical problems, including angina, high blood pressure and diabetes.

But the medical problems mask the fact that in his day, Beattie Huntley was one hell of an athlete, coach, sports organizer and Santa Claus.

Say what?

Huntley is, well, of a physical stature that exhibits the pounds necessary to fill the role of the jolly red gent. He remembered how he secured position in the mid-90s through the late Jack Wilson, who was then the manager of Chamber of Commerce, sponsors of the parade.

"I was watching the (Trenton Santa Claus) parade," he said in an interview at his home in Sunny Creek Estates. "This Santa came along. He just sat there.

"I got on the phone and I said, 'Jack, are you looking for a real Santa Claus?'"

Wilson said yes, and Huntley told him, "You've found one."

Those who witnessed Huntley/Santa know he was splendid in the role, both during the parade and afterward greeting children in the Trent Port Mall. But he was replaced last year after a dispute with some Trenton chamber of commerce and Downtown Business Improvement Area officials.

"I was really, really upset," Huntley recalled. "I love the kids, eh."

He was also an innovator of sorts. He created the role of Mrs. Claus for wife Nancy, who then accompanied him. It was one of the original two-Clauses acts.

"Now everybody does it," he noted. Sarah, the couple's granddaughter, was recruited as an elf, but the Huntleys were careful to conceal their identities from the youngster.

However, the inevitable happened when Sarah grew a little older. When asked how she eventually identified granddad as Santa, Sarah gave one of those replies that only children can utter.

"Cause he's got a big honker," she said, laughing.

Huntley still dons the suit and beard for paid gigs at Canadian Tire and Leon's, and he and Nancy visit the gatherings of some families on Christmas Eve at no charge.

"It's just something Nancy and I can give back to the community," he shrugged.

He also goes on air at CJTN Radio a couple of weeks before Dec. 25 and takes Christmas wish calls from kids.

Somehow, Huntley seems to find himself in the limelight, even when he isn't trying.

He and Sarah travelled to Kingston to watch a game involving Wayne Lewis's soccer team, which they follow (Sarah is a soccer player). Huntley ended up talking with a guy who happened to be connected with community channel Rogers Cable 13. The next thing he knew, he had been recruited to conduct segments of soccer interviews.

Huntley, who quickly conquered butterflies, was a hit.

"I'm too old to get nervous — they want me back next year," he said.

It's not surprising to discover Huntley journeying 67 km to take in a soccer game — sports were a part of his life for decades.

He's always had a taste and talent for athleticism.

Growing up in Toronto, at the age of 16 he was recruited by the Toronto Marboros in 1958. In those days players went to the Toronto Maple Leafs from the Marlies and as a result Huntley found himself sharing the Gardens ice with future stars Bobby Baun, Billy Harris

In 1972, he transferred to the diamond once again and coached the Barry and Forchuk Midget hardball team and guided the boys to the Eastern Ontario Baseball Championship.

He was now helping young men reach their potential, but he decided to reach out to those who could not play at an all-star level.

In 1974 he started an Industrial League for "guys who hadn't played before. Recreation, I guess you could put it."

Then followed an hiatus of a few years, but Huntley had a new dream and in the early 1980s, with the help of Bob and Barb Jones, formed the Trenton and District Men's Horse-shoe League, with 10 entries playing at the air base.

The league soon grew to 24 teams and changed venues to the Elk's Lodge in Trenton. The popularity of the league left one problem.

"There was not a place big enough to hold our (annual) banquet," Huntley recalled with a laugh.

The league was cut to 22 teams, then 20, but there were still 220 men playing every Tuesday night.

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