

Community Church Kids Ball Hockey League celebrates 18 years

By Neil McKenzie-Sutter
Special to the IFF

This spring, the Georgetown Community Church/Salvation Army kids outdoor ball hockey league enters its 18th season.

It's a significant landmark, especially considering the league's low cost to participants: \$50 per child or \$45 each if siblings are enrolled together.

The fees that we charge are affordable. That's one of the big things, said Jack Oesch, one of the church members who helped start the league in 1998.

There's no one who can't play because of monetary reasons, Oesch continued, talking about the Georgetown Community Church's program to support families who want to get their kids involved, but may be struggling financially.

The league is of course partially a spiritual outreach program by the church, so the kids are expected to participate in a 10-15 minute devotional service every week.

The low cost and the spiritual focus, however, do not mean the quality of play is lessened, because the league is well organized despite a small operating budget.

Ball hockey started on April 5 and runs every Tuesday for ten weeks until June 7, and at this point in the 2016 season approximately 70 kids are enrolled in eight teams: four teams in the 6-9 year-old junior age group, and four teams in the 10-13 senior age group.

But the low operating costs and willingness of the Georgetown Community Church to take a loss on the operation has led to highs and lows over the years.

For example the league reached peak enrollment in 2004-05 with 130-140 participants before falling to around 35-40 in a few years.

In response, in 2010-11 the church expanded its sports programs to include a kids basketball league running through

Sept.-Nov., a volleyball league running through Jan.-March for adult and teens, both of which cost \$50 per person as well.

Additionally, the church now runs a sports day camp for kids through Aug. 22-26, priced at \$130 per child or, or \$125 if siblings are enrolled.

These expanded programs are part of what the church leadership sees as the reason for the rise in ball hockey participants currently signed up.

It's part of Jack's vision that led us to add some of our other programs, said Emily Allen, who began overseeing the church's sports program in 2010.

I've been able to offer office and administrative support to help things flow and interact with the parents, Allen continued.

Oesch and Allen make up the leadership that's helped the sports organization flourish, but the program wouldn't have been able to function without many other committed volunteers.

The volunteer team has people of all ages involved, but a unique leadership opportunity is afforded to teens interested in being coaches.

Starting at 14, interested teens are put through a leadership course and abuse awareness program by the Salvation Army, and are put in charge of individual ball hockey teams as coaches.

Significantly, about 75 per cent of teens who decide to be coaches went through the ball hockey program as kids.

It's really rewarding to see that whole cycle of kids. They'll do six, seven years in the sports program and then they'll come and volunteer, Allen said, regarding the kids who return to the program as coaches, which she believes has been an additional factor in participation growth as well.

Anyone interested in learning more or getting involved should check out the Georgetown Community Church website at: <http://georgetowncommunitychurch.ca>



Junior age group goalie Landon Thomas and player Jack Bell (wearing the number 51 jersey) preparing to resume play. The Salvation Army Church Ball Hockey League plays every Tuesday evening in the Church parking lot at 271 Mountainview Rd. S.

Photo by Neil McKenzie-Sutter

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