

## 2016 Georgetown Hockey Heritage recipient: Gary Stone

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Gary Stone has been involved with minor hockey in Georgetown in some respect for a little more than half a century, whether as a player, coach or volunteer.

The 55-year-old has been named the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award recipient for 2016 and the 39th-annual dinner in Stone's honour will take place March 7 in Acton.

Recognized by many for his accomplishments as a head coach at the rep, select and house league levels, Stone was just as instrumental in doing behind-the-scenes work on the Georgetown Minor Hockey Association executive and continues on today with the Halton Hills youth organization.

After his youth hockey playing days were over at age 19, Stone saw a sign at McDonald's Restaurant asking for volunteer coaches with the GMHA and for the first few years was behind the bench of midget and bantam house league teams.

Admittedly a coach who takes an "aggressive" approach to the game, Stone has used some out-of-the-box methods of teaching while keeping the message simplistic for his players.

"If you can out-skate the other team, the breakout comes naturally and I truly believe that you need to learn to skate first before anything else," he said.

"With the Super 7s (selects), we didn't touch a puck until Christmas. When you can skate, you'll get the puck, because if you can't skate during the game, you're not going to get the puck anyways. I see coaches trying these wonderful breakout patterns and systems and the kids can't give or receive a pass, so they just skip that part. I like a flow-style

practice where everybody's moving and we pollute the ice with 20 players— the more the merrier— APs (affiliated players), everyone. I want traffic, I want motion and I want you to keep your head up. If they can survive that, when the game starts, they'll see everything clearly."

Stone rents local gymnasiums "that don't cost \$6 a minute" to run skate-free practices with a white board, taking the time to explain to his players why they are doing a particular drill and what skills they're using in the process.

He was the first GMHA coach to rent the relatively tiny Leisure Skating Pad at the Acton Arena and was laughed at by one coaching colleague who asked if Stone got free hot dogs for using the living-room-sized surface because that's where birthday-party skates were held.

"Hockey games are won and lost in tight spaces and back then you couldn't find a stitch of extra ice anywhere in this town," Stone asserted.

"I paid \$19 for the hour. The kids each brought a loonie and away we went. At first, we couldn't use nets and had to use these orange plastic pucks. That year we won the Christmas tourney and the league championship because we had that little extra jump. A year later, we rented \$14,000 worth of ice time on that pad to the (GMHA)."

Some of Stone's best memories were during the four years he coached a group of novice and atom AA players born in 1995 that included 2013 Dallas Stars' first-round pick Jason Dickinson, future OHLers Jacob Harris and Darren Raddysh and Liam Clare of Sacred Heart University. His son Tom also played on the team and wife Leanne was the manager.

One season, the Raiders won



Georgetown's Gary Stone began playing youth hockey here in 1965 and went on to become a coach and executive member in various positions, remaining active in the Halton Hills Minor Hockey Association today. He is the 2016 Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award recipient.

Photo by Eamonn Maher

98 games and the core group was together for 25 championships, including two Ontario Minor Hockey Association titles and major tournament wins in Ottawa, Preston and California.

"All those kids were thoroughbreds. No matter how hard you skated them, there was no stopping them," Stone recalled.

"It got to a point where if we phoned a tournament to play in, they wouldn't sign us up right away because as soon as our name went up on the website, other teams wouldn't go. There were no complaints. Every-

body showed up, even at six o'clock in the morning, ready to go hard."

Stone has held several executive positions with the GMHA, such as director of Junior House League and Rep, along with a variety of convenor roles.

Several years ago, a two-hour block of ice time was made available Sunday afternoons to rep goalies for development practices, yet the sessions were sparsely attended because their teams usually played that day. So some executive members suggested that house league netminders be allowed to take part

in the goalie clinics as well, so Stone volunteered to lug the many bags of equipment back and forth from rink to rink in his SUV.

"We had 30 young goalies out per session and there were a lot of guys who came by to help us with shooting drills," added, who is coaching a bantam white house league team this season.

"Before that the house league goalies wouldn't get that attention and the bonus for them was the ice time was free. It was special for them and it's still going strong today."

A tool-and-die maker who now runs the stamping operation with M&P Tools at the Brampton company owned by Georgetown resident Max Prufer, Stone said he's grateful to his employer for letting him quite often leave work early for the past 33 years in order to fulfill his minor hockey commitments, especially when as rep coach that could sometimes take up 28 days in a month.

Minor hockey has always been a family affair with the Stones as Gary coached both sons and his daughters volunteered by playing music at games or timekeeping.

One of the most rewarding moments came in 2000 when his daughter Teri had to undergo bone marrow transplant surgery and about two dozen GMHA members got their heads shaved by Leanne and Teri during the Heads for a Cure fundraiser, which generated more than \$20,000 for cancer research.

"I said to (late long-time GMHA president) Hal Pells that day, 'Finally, we're doing something that means more than just hockey.'"

This year's Hockey Heritage Award Dinner will be held Monday, March 7 at the Acton Legion.

Tickets are \$75 each. For more info call 905-877-6710.



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