

FORMER TWISTERS PRESIDENT GRACE RYLETT NAMED HOCKEY HERITAGE WINNER

HERB GARBUTT
hgarbutt@metroland.com

Grace Rylett was helping line up sponsors prior to the Halton Hills Twisters' first season, when she approached one business that was willing to help out by purchasing goalie equipment for the startup organization.

The sponsor was more than happy to do its part in helping give local girls the opportunity to play hockey, but there was some concern.

It had been less than six months since the idea had first been proposed. Pam and Bill MacGillivray had been driving their daughters to Brampton to play hockey and they thought it was time girls from Halton Hills had the opportunity to play in their own town. Rylett was among the parents the MacGillivrays discussed their idea with on the sidelines of their kids' soccer games. Rylett's 10-year-old daughter, Cheryl, had recently expressed an interest in playing hockey for the first time.

Rylett signed on to help the MacGillivrays, becoming the organization's first secretary. And while her main duty was registering players with the Ontario Women's Hockey Association, there was much more that needed to be done if the

fledgling group was going to be ready to hit the ice in September. It had no money in the bank as it prepared to start its first season.

That's how Rylett found herself rounding up sponsors and making sure the 80 girls had the equipment they needed to begin play.

So after Rylett sensed a bit of hesitation, she agreed to the sponsor's one condition - if the Twisters didn't last, she would return the equipment.

Rylett would go on to serve on the Twisters' executive for more than a decade, the last five years as president after assuming the mantle from the MacGillivrays.

Most people, when reflecting on their involvement with a group, focus on what they did. Rylett's biggest source of pride is something she didn't do.

"I never had to return that equipment," said the 2019 winner of the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award.

Today, the Twisters have 639 players competing on 27 house league, five select and 13 rep teams.

"From humble beginnings we were able to build," Rylett said. "We eventually got everyone playing in all the proper age groups with four teams in each division, rep teams. And we built something

that has sustainability."

Rylett said the town was always very supportive of the Twisters. She still remembers a contentious meeting where existing ice users were being asked to give up some of their already scarce time for the Twisters.

"Joy Thompson (from the Town of Halton Hills) reminded them the arena was there for hockey, not boys' hockey," Rylett said. "It was pretty quiet after that."

By the time Rylett took over as president in 2003, the Twisters were at a critical juncture. With no more ice time available in Halton Hills and the expansion of the Mold-Masters SportsPlex still a decade away, registration was capped at 200 players.

The twin-pad Milton Sports Centre had just opened and the Twisters already had a number of players from Milton. So the Twisters approached the Town of Milton about expanding their program. After securing ice time in Milton allowing the Twisters to expand its roster of teams, the organization was re-branded as the North Halton Girls Hockey Association.

With Rylett at the helm, other initiatives were introduced by forming partnerships. Teaming up with the Georgetown Referees' Asso-



Graham Paine/Metroland

Grace Rylett, the former secretary and president of the North Halton Twisters was recently honoured with the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Award.

ciation, the Twisters started a program to train more female officials. Working with Georgetown Minor Hockey, they introduced the FUNdamentals program, the equivalent of the boys' initiation program (IP).

The Twisters hosted National Women's Hockey League games in Georgetown, got involved with other sports organizations on projects like the Halton Hills Sports Museum and the Georgetown Hockey Heritage dinner.

When two deaf players joined the organization, the Twisters hired sign language interpreters. Eventually, players took matters into their own hands.

"Teams of girls started

learning sign language," Rylett said. "It helped break down some barriers."

Being a relatively new organization also gave the Twisters some freedom to experiment. For their 10th anniversary, rather than handing out trophies and medals at the year-end banquet, players got a Twisters teddy bear.

"It created a bit of a stir and it was pooh-poohed by the hockey traditionalists," Rylett said. "It was a chance to step outside the box and do something a little different."

And the bears were a hit. When Rylett needed one for a Twisters anniversary event, she had to make a dozen phone calls before

she found a player willing to surrender her bear for the night.

In Rylett's final year as president, a women's division was added, not only giving both mothers and daughters the opportunity to play for the Twisters, but also ensuring girls could continue to enjoy the game when their minor hockey days were over.

"That was always the best part," Rylett said, "watching the kids, seeing how they develop and seeing the smiles on their faces."

Rylett will be honoured at the Georgetown Hockey Heritage Dinner Monday, March 4 at 7 p.m. at the Acton Legion.

COUNTDOWN TO THE
RAIDERS
NEXT HOME GAME

Saturday Jan. 12thnd, 2019
7:30 pm at Mold-Masters SportsPlex
Georgetown Raiders
vs.
Wellington Dukes

312 GUELPH ST.,
GEORGETOWN
905-877-2296

GEORGETOWN
TOYOTA

www.georgetowntoyota.com