

SPORTS

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30 years of service... and counting

'Hawks pay tribute to tireless volunteer

He's the guy behind the scenes, the one who does all those thankless tasks — everything from filling water bottles and taking care of the sticks to assisting the trainer and running the clock.



In the stands

with STEVE LeBLANC

Tonight, Hal Gies — Milton junior hockey's all-purpose utility man, as I like to think of him — gets his just recognition. To commemorate his 30th year with the local franchise, new owner Rick Heinz and the IceHawks will honour the seasoned volunteer with a special presentation prior to their home-ice clash with the Streetsville Derbys — who fittingly enough were Milton's chief rival when he first started with the team as a teenager all those years ago.

At the risk of stating the obvious, tonight's tribute is certainly well-deserved.

"What I think of most about Hal is just his dedication," says former workhorse defenceman John Nadalin, who captained the 2000/01 team — when it was known as the Merchants. "I remember one night in my final year there was this really bad snowstorm and he had to come in from Acton. He was a half-hour late, but he still made it in."

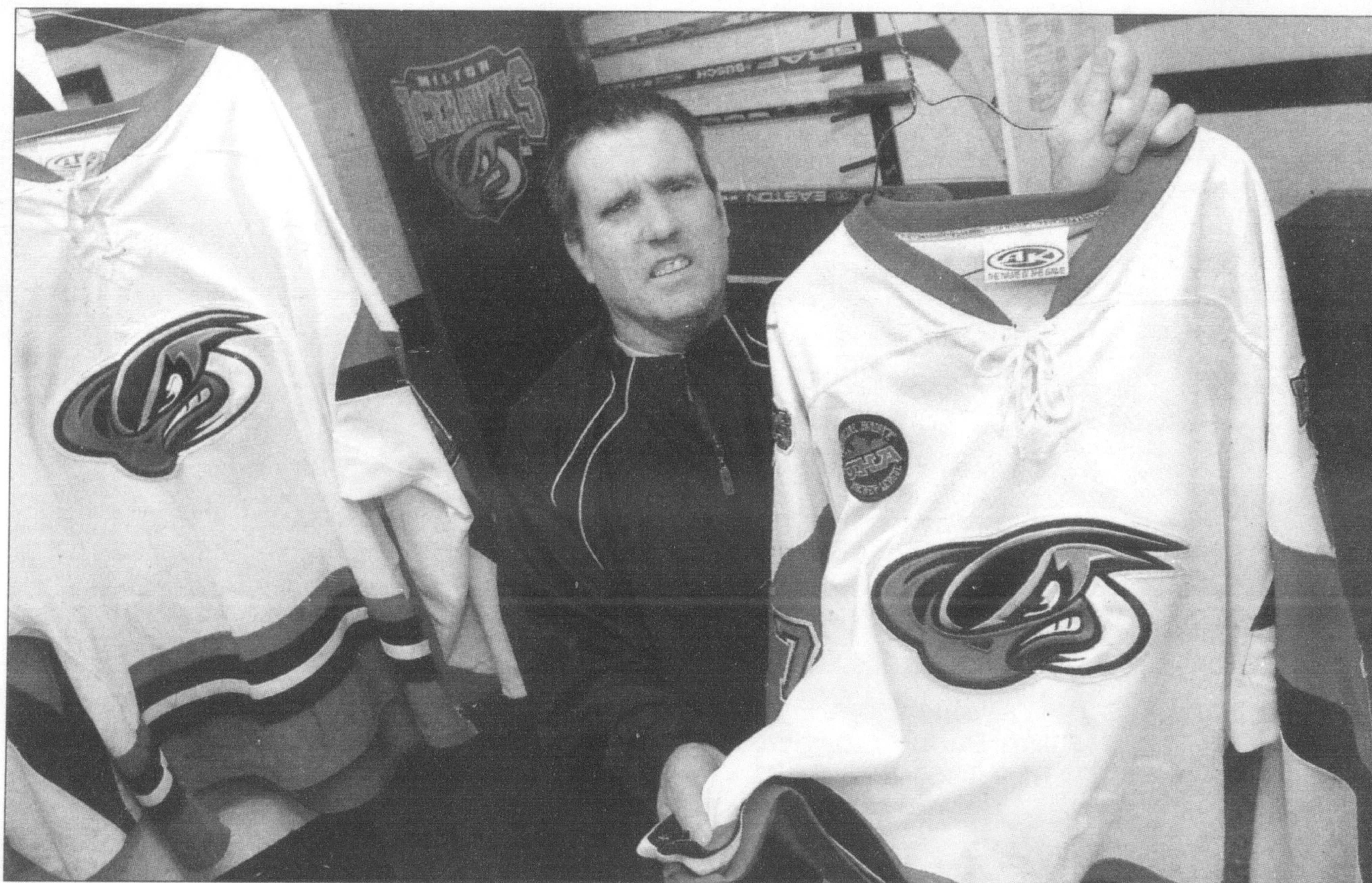
Adds ex-owner Brad Grant (1986-2001), "Hal's a jack of all trades and extremely reliable. It's great to see they're honouring him this way."

If you're a regular at Memorial Arena Friday nights, you're bound to know Hal. But what many may not know is that his volunteer efforts extend well beyond local sporting circles.

Along with helping out the IceHawks and Jr. B Mavericks' lacrosse team — up until last season, anyway — he donates his time to Allendale and the Bishop Reding daycare facility, as a weekend bartender and food delivery man respectively. And that's on top of his work with Community Living North Halton, where as one of the few clients with a driver's licence he helps out with regular deliveries.

Talking with Hal, it's sometimes easy to forget he's developmentally challenged. But he's not likely to forget much of the team's history over the past three decades — including any of the hundreds of players who've come through the ranks during that time.

"He's Mr. Hockey," notes Grant. "Hal probably couldn't tell you what time of day it is, but if you want to know the name of a certain player from 20 years ago, chances are he'll know who you're thinking of. He's an encyclopedia of all players past and present."



GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

HAL OF A DEDICATED VOLUNTEER: Hal Gies, whose numerous duties with the IceHawks include taking care of the jerseys, will be honoured prior to tonight's game.

And while Hal's been prone to getting a bit of a hard time from the occasional player over the years, he's earned those same guys' respect in the end.

Says Nadalin, "When it comes to ribbing, Hal's one to give as good as he gets. When I hear from old teammates they all want to know how Hal's doing."

That was definitely evident at last year's alumni game.

"To a man, every player came over at some point during the night and said, 'Hey Hal, how's it going?' or 'Good to see you, Hal,'" recalls IceHawks' announcer Rob Wiseman, who looks back fondly on the help he received from his now regular time box counterpart when he first started with the club three years ago. "I've known Hal for years just being around the arena and always known him to be quite tireless in his efforts, but I never knew just how dedicated he was until I started working with the team. He just does everything they ask him."

Along with being one of the longest-serving volunteers in

the Provincial Jr. A League, Hal can be about as spirited a fan as you'll find at this level. And while occasionally over-zealous, his enthusiasm has been known to be an emotional catalyst for both players and spectators alike.

"He wears his heart on his sleeve," says Grant.

Over the past three decades, Hal's seen our local juniors operate under four different names — going back to their time as the Flyers — and go through far too many owners and coaches to name here.

In an era of junior hockey that's become a revolving door of faces, Hal remains one of the precious few constants.

"I'm a fixture here," remarks the beloved volunteer.

So what keeps him coming back year in and year out?

"I just enjoy it. It's something to do on a Friday night. I've been lucky to be part of the team."

To say the least, the club's been equally fortunate — if not more so — to have you around, Hal.

This is your night. Enjoy it.



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