

Little NHL the biggest ever

By Jim Windle

MISSISSAUGA - They came from every corner of Ontario to the traditional home of the Mississaugas of the New Credit to take part in the world's biggest Native hockey Tournament this week, running from Opening Ceremonies this past Sunday to the finale of Championship games and the formal closing on Thursday.

What began as a small gathering of northern Nations hosting a day-long tournament in 1972 has blossomed into 177 teams at four arenas, in all divisions, this year including girls divisions, and it is still growing.

The logistics of keeping all these games running on time and in order is a miracle in itself, but the organizers and a posse of volunteers have already made the annual Little NHL Tournament it a success already.

Crowds of parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, and aunts were present throughout the event. The ice pads at the Hershey Centre, Meadowvale Arena, Iceland, and the Tompkin Rinks are crowded every day with Onkwehonwe people, and unless you thought of it earlier, finding lodging anywhere near Mississauga was near impossible.

The tournament is set up to make it an equally valuable and fun experience for both large and small reserves. The Dreamcatcher Fund helped many communities send teams to this year's little NHL.

The opening ceremonies and registration day saw flags from each community flying proud-



Little NHL 2015 began on Sunday. There are over 177 First Nations hockey teams gathered to compete. Dignitaries from First Nations communities across Ontario participated in the opening ceremonies at the Hershey Centre in Mississauga. Andrew Zimmer, Mayor of Mississauga and New Credit Chief Bryan LaForme were among others here at the puck drop. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE

ly as parents and players got situated in their hotel rooms and scouted out the participating arenas.

"We are really excited to be a big part of this year's tournament," said New Credit Chief Brian Laforme. "We are recognized as the host Nation because of it being held now in Mississauga, our traditional home."

The official host Nations are Aundeck-Omni-Kaning First Nation and Whitefish River First Nations.

"As two of the original founders, both Aundeck-Omni-Kaning First Nation and Whitefish River First Nation have strived to build upon the foundation of Sportsmanship, Citizenship, Education and Respect throughout this year's planning process," says a joint mes-

sage from Whitefish River First Nation Chief Frank-

lin Paibomsai and Chief Patsy Corbiere of Aundeck

Omni Kaning. "We strongly believe that this year's

theme "We Are All Stars" embodies these important values.

Ontario's Minister of Aboriginal Affairs David Zimmer was on hand to congratulate the organizers and the Nations involved, as well as Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie.

With its steady growth and size, it is no longer difficult coming up with corporate sponsorships for the annual event to help make it one of the leading sporting events of its kind in Ontario.

The games resume Wednesday and Thursday when the Champions will be decided, however, all who participate are made to feel that way anyhow, no matter what happens on the ice.

TOP: A familiar scene of parents and coaches helping young future stars on with their equipment was seen time and time again as teams traveled from arena to arena. PHOTO BY JIM WINDLE