

Hockey enthusiast credits parents

By KATE GILDERDALE
Those involved in Stouffville's minor sports organizations need no introduction to Wally Crowder, whose enthusiasm and dedication have helped many young players not only to improve their skills, but also to enjoy participating in their favorite sport.



WALLY CROWDER
Hockey at heart

Wally, who was born and brought up in Stouffville, was involved as a player in minor hockey for many years himself. "The calibre of play now is a lot better than when I was seven or eight," he maintains. "Then we would have around twelve guys on a team and some of them would be four years older than me. They didn't have divisions and it was just one big game of shinny."
In Hockey school, power skating and figure skating lessons have all added to the young players' basic skills Wally feels. "I couldn't believe the number of kids going to hockey school this summer." Safety is another area that has changed the way the game is played. "When I was small, we didn't have masks and helmets," recalls Wally. "Now they are well protected and that gives them more confidence."
His interest in the Stouffville hockey scene was re-kindled when his eldest son Graham began to play five years ago. "I didn't play again until he started band then I got hooked in and

didn't get out," he grins. Hockey School had just started here and Wally helped out with that in the first year. He believes the program has done a good job for the system. "They turn out pretty decent hockey players these days."

With sons Graham and Adam both involved, Wally turned his energies to coaching. "For the last two years I've been on the executive and I'll be on it for another two years at least," he declares. He won't be coaching in the coming season though. "This year I'm going to watch both my boys play," he explains.

Despite declining registration figures in older age groups, Wally has noticed a resurgence of interest among younger players. "With a really strong minor system for kids up to 12, we hope we'll be able to keep them after

that as well." Parent interest is a key factor he believes. "A lot has to do with parents showing up," he claims. "We always make sure someone is at the game for our kids."

With five children of his own, he acknowledges that it isn't an easy task, particularly when everyone's involved in various activities, including dancing, figure skating and hockey in the winter and baseball and swimming in the summer, usually at different levels and times.

"It really gets crazy sometimes, and I never know who is supposed to be where," he admits, adding that none of it would be possible without his wife Brenda's incredible organizational skills. "Somehow everyone always gets where they're supposed to be, and usually on time." To add to their hectic schedule, Wally plays baseball and hockey himself as well as coaching baseball, and Brenda plays on a local ball team.

Many of the men who play hockey with him for the Stouffville Classics are team mates from his youth. "There must be eight to ten of us who played together back then," he muses. "Most of them have lived all their lives in town." Wally and Brenda moved to Oshawa for a few years after they got married, returning to Stouffville to raise their family.

Now that the baseball season is winding down, things have been especially chaotic in the Crowder household. Brenda has a tournament coming up, daughter Alison's team have just completed theirs, and Graham and Adam's are on the same weekend. "That's also when I'm organizing my first hockey tournament," laughs Wally. "Everything comes up on the same day. We need an extra day or two every week."

Although he enjoys coaching baseball, he admits it can be frustrating when half the team is away on summer vacations. "With a hockey team I had 12 or 13 kids. I knew they would show up even when they were sick. I had 15 this year in ball and sometimes only five showed up." Nevertheless, he feels the Association does an excellent job, with around 700 youngsters participating this year.

Wally has seen Stouffville grow from a small farming community into a sizeable town. "When I was a kid everyone knew everyone else," he recalls. Many of those people are still here, including councillor Wilf Morley, who once taught Wally at school.

Even a person with the energy and enthusiasm of Wally Crowder admits there is a limit to his involvement in community life. "You can say I won't be running for mayor," he concludes, laughing.

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