

Hockey

# Big changes in front office of languishing Spirit

By **BRUCE STAPLEY**  
Correspondent

A call for help has brought the local cavalry to the aid of the Stouffville Spirit.

Past Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association (WSMHA) president Wally Crowder has agreed to take over as general manager of the first year Provincial Junior A Hockey League team, while area resident Dave Probert will assume the position of marketing and public relations director.

The moves were announced Thursday, culminating a whirl wind week which began with talk of the possible take over of the team by a Newmarket-based consortium. Management problems experienced by the Spirit had led the club's owner/general manager/coach George Stavro to turn to local interests for assistance. It was learned that a group of Spirit sponsors, headed up by Choko Design owner Ed Hakonson, had shored up the team's finances in the past two weeks as well.

Crowder, a member of the



From left, Wally Crowder, general manager, Steve Stavro, ownership partner and coach and Dave Probert, marketing manager and public relations represent the new front office of the Stouffville Spirit.

club's original board of directors, said he responded to a need to have more local involvement with the Spirit. "George (Stavro) asked for my help in the management area," said Crowder, whose son, Graham, is a defenceman with the Spirit. "It was crunch time. They needed

more local participation. With the connections we both (he and Probert) have locally, hopefully we should be able to fill the stands."

Crowder said there would be several more meetings held over the next few days to determine the course to be followed by the new man-

agement team.

He said a promotion package would be put together to sell the club to the town. He added there would be no change in the team's ownership.

Stavro said it was his desire to win over the people of the Stouffville area to the Spirit on a long term basis.

"Basically, we're restructuring the management. I want to get the community behind us for many years to come."

Stavro said he would continue on as coach "for now," but that he would reassess his position with the team to see where he best fits in.

"I want to see how much time I can give to this. This (Crowder and Probert's involvement) frees me up somewhat."

Stavro said it was important for

the team to convince the town it was healthy. "We wanted to do away with the fears. We're not going to collapse."

Hakonson, who attempted to bring a Junior squad to Stouffville in the early 1990's, told the Tribune it was important to stabilize the team in a time of uncertainty. He said his and the other sponsors financial assistance in recent weeks was simply an attempt to get the team back on track, and that he had no interest in purchasing the team.

He said he hoped to analyze the team's financial situation over the next few weeks.

"We just wanted to stabilize the team, look after the fares, etc. It wasn't a mess, there were just some hiccups. I wouldn't like to see it fail after all the work George has put into it."

He said the team has talented players, but has suffered a management blip.

"We now have a local person to take over. There's a terrific work load, more than one person can do." He said the new moves will go a long way towards helping the team win on the ice.

"The players were a little unnerved, they'd heard some rumors. Now they can settle down." He said it's time for the community to get behind the Spirit, and said he hopes to see the formation of a Spirit booster club.

Current WSMHA president Maureen Markle told the Tribune Thursday that while she still hadn't heard confirmation of management changes, the situation sounded positive.

"It can't hurt," she said, saying the move would see the Spirit and the WSMHA become more closely entwined. She said Stavro has been hampered by a lack of manpower at the management level.

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