

Men's league defends arena staff over ice time squeeze

By **BRUCE STAPLEY**
Correspondent

A local men's hockey league including 300 players has come to the defence of recreation office staff after the town employees were blamed for failing to provide enough ice time to the local Spirit of Stouffville Junior A hockey club this season.

Don Moore, president of the Stouffville Amateur Hockey League (SAHL) held a press conference Sunday because, he said, "The other side of the story hasn't been told." Moore, whose own league had its ice time cut back and rescheduled in recent years, said his league had nothing but respect for how the town, and the various user groups, have handled the ice time squeeze. "We feel it's very unfair that the Spirit have taken personal shots at recreation office staff."

Moore said the Spirit was represented at a meeting called by office staff to discuss the ice crunch last spring. When they didn't get the ice time they were looking for, they claimed there was a "conspiracy" against them, said Moore. The Spirit eventually convinced town officials to give them a Tuesday night spot for practices, moving an adult public skating slot to

Wednesday nights.

Moore said all user groups but the Spirit were willing to work together to accommodate each other. "There was great camaraderie among the user groups," he said, adding that the groups agreed to help offset the extra costs incurred by the local minor hockey association when it was forced to rent out-of-town ice. "Minor hockey did nothing but give up, give up, give up."

Moore said the arena staff should be commended for conferring with user groups rather than simply imposing their own schedules. "It's so refreshing to be asked to work things out, and not just told," he said. "There's an open door policy in this town, and that's commendable."

Moore said cooperation has been forthcoming from the user groups, who knew the ice crunch would loosen up with the coming of the second pad. He credited the groups for working together to bring about the second pad. He said cooperation has to be a two way street, but that the Spirit wasn't willing to give. "We've always wanted to work with everybody. But if it's take, take, take then it will never work."

Spirit owner Ed Hakonson said after the recently completed season that he was going to move the team

due to a lack of support in Stouffville. Moore said he doubted there would be a town that would give as much as Stouffville had. "I don't think he's going to find another town that will treat him with the concern and accommodation this town has," said Moore.

Mayor Wayne Emmerson was to sit down with Hakonson this week to offer a proposal for keeping the club in town.

Province denies ordering freeze on board budgets

By **MIKE ADLER**
Staff Reporter

The provincial Education Improvement Commission has not been told to refuse all school board budgets which include a tax increase, a commission co-chair says.

"We haven't been given that direction," Dave Cooke said in an interview last week. Cooke, confirmed this month as head of the powerful body which would supervise the boards under Bill 104, said nothing in the legislation would allow the commission to roll back a mill rate set by a board. He was responding to remarks from York Region public board vice-

chair Karen Barker, who last week said she believes Education Minister John Snobelen will use the commission's power to change board budgets as a way to stop any increases.

"The purpose of having some kind of overseer is to make sure that nothing unusual occurs," such as preventing a board from selling off all its assets, said Cooke.

Both he and co-chair Ann Vanstone made similar statements to a committee of MPPs last week. Vanstone said the commission will look at budgets "for just any very unusual moves that a board might make," and added: "We wouldn't anticipate very much of that."

But Newmarket public trustee Rodney Dunn said he was skeptical of how much freedom Snobelen, who has criticized both York boards for hiking taxes, will give Vanstone or Cooke. "I can't believe this government is going to just let them run the show."

The public board's new budget chief, Dunn said the board had been aiming at a 1.76 per cent increase — slightly less than last year. But recent "speculation," he said, suggests that amount might also be unacceptable to the province.

"It's looking more like they're not willing to allow any mill rate increases," said Dunn.

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