

SPORTS

Have team, will travel

Stouffville's Gary McDonell has spent the past 25 years organizing minor hockey trips to Europe

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

So you want to take your minor hockey team to Europe?

You can get out your atlas and gather with team officials and parents, taking the advice of someone who went to Germany with his old timers' hockey team some 15 years ago.

Or you can call Gary McDonell. McDonell operates Sports Tours Inc. out of the kitchen of his Stouffville area home.

The 60-year-old former advertising executive has been sending minor hockey teams to Europe to play exhibition games and see the sights for more than 25 years. He choreographed the first ever European tour by an Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) team from Aurora, and is currently an official tour organizer of the OMHA.

Among his clients are the Stouffville bantam Clippers, who are to undertake a tour of Austria, Germany and the Czech Republic over the Christmas holidays. The 12-day trip sees the team play six games while touring such sites as a Second World War concentration camp, the world's largest castle and an ancient fortress.

McDonell offers his services to groups from across Southern Ontario.

He helps with everything from destination selection right through the booking of airline tickets, hotel rooms, bus transfers and the list of opponents to be played during the tour. He'll even offer fundraising ideas to help pay for the venture.

The planning starts a year in advance," said McDonell, who said he meets with representatives of the group as many as 15 times prior to the departure date.

That might not be cost-efficient from a large company stand-

point, but I really enjoy doing it. I get to know them like a brother by the time we're finished."

According to McDonell, the secret to a successful tour lies in the amount of attention given to detail.

"There are a ton of little things that have to be looked after. If any one of them goes off track, it's not good."

McDonell cut his teeth as a tour organizer in 1971 when, as coach of a team of North York six-year-olds, he arranged a trip to Finland for the players and their parents.

He was asked by the airline flying the group to Europe if he would be interested in organizing similar undertakings for others groups.

"I knew hockey, so that's what I built the business on. Eventually I broadened it out to include groups of amateur singers and dancers as well."

What started out as a part time venture became a full time endeavor when McDonell moved to Stouffville in 1988.

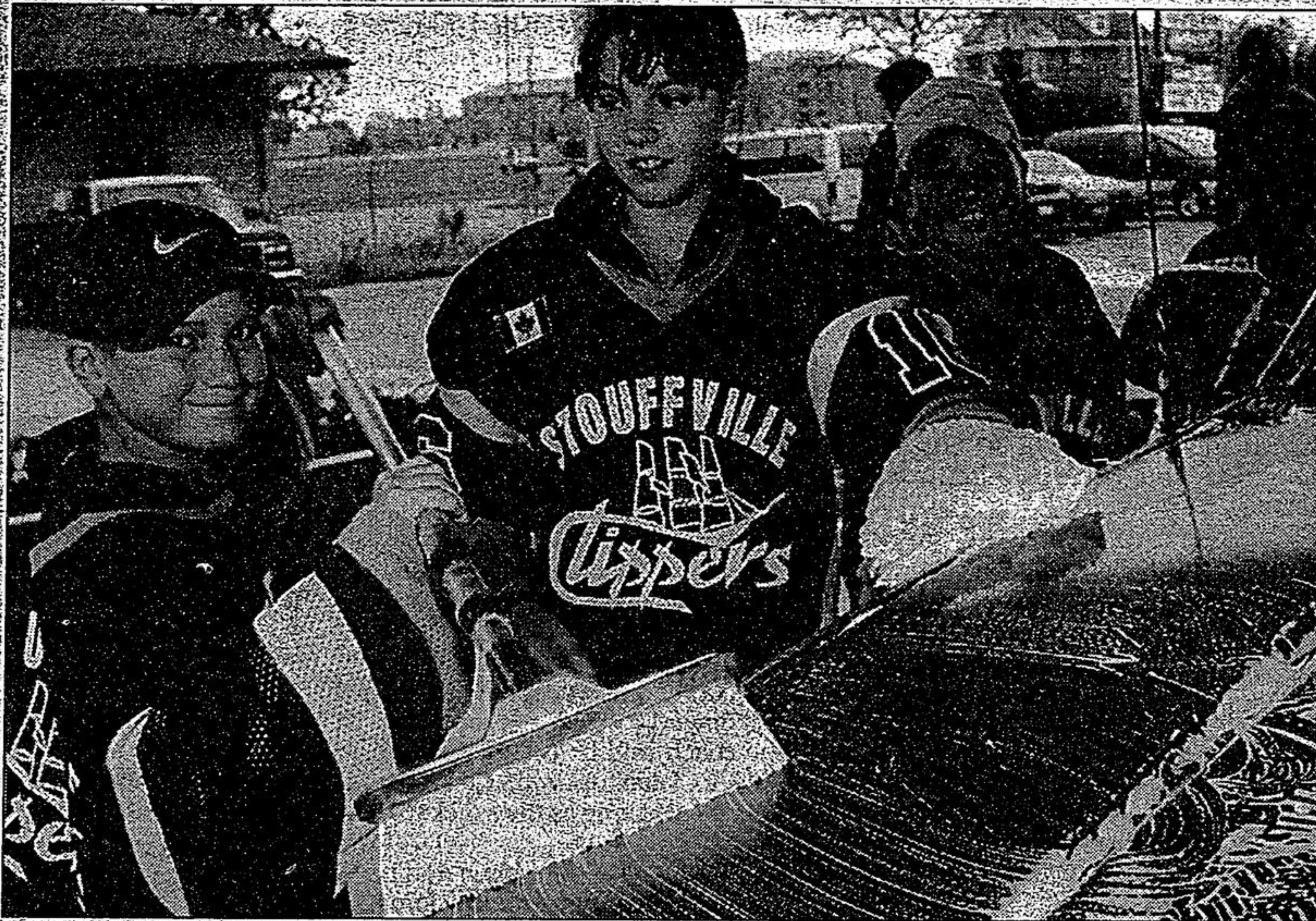
He suggests southern European tours similar to the one being taken by the Stouffville group are among the most successful.

"When you tour cities like Salzburg (Austria), Munich (Germany) and Prague (Czech Republic), the kids can be kept active and there's lots to keep the adults interested."

Other popular destinations include Amsterdam, Paris, France, Belgium and London, England.

While McDonell used to accompany his client groups to Europe, he now leaves the job of overseeing the actual tours to people hired in the destination countries.

See TOURS, page 16.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

CLIPPERS CLEAN UP

From left, Todd Nesbitt, Christina Davis and Jeff Sutcliffe of the Stouffville Clippers peewee hockey team rub in the soap at the team's carwash on Saturday. The event was held to raise funds for the team's trip to New York state for a tournament.

Spirit win three in a row

Junior squad ties club record for success

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
CORRESPONDENT

It may not be time to begin the cries to break up the Spirit of Stouffville just yet.

But after chalking up a franchise record-tying three wins in three nights over the weekend the Provincial Junior A Hockey League squad seems to be on the way up.

The Spirit juggernaut rolled over the Huntsville Wildcats 9-4 at the Rec Centre Thursday night. The Stouffville club hit the road to record victories of 8-2 over the Shelburne Wolves Friday and 4-2 versus the Thornhill Rattlers Saturday.

The wins left the Spirit alone in fifth place in the Central Conference standings with a record of seven wins and six losses.

Their total of 75 goals is just two short of the first place Newmarket Hurricanes.

"That's exactly what we needed going into this week," said Spirit head coach Brian Perrin of the big

weekend.

The Spirit host the second place Couchiching Terriers Thursday night at 7:30 before entertaining the third place Collingwood Blues in a rare Saturday night home appearance.

The Spirit scored five power play goals on their way to a 9-4 win over the Wildcats Thursday night.

Kevin Edgar netted a hat-trick while line mate Phil Barski had quartet of assists. Mike Tucciarone chipped in with a pair of goals. J.D. Smithson, Brendan McCann, Beau Llewellyn and Mike Micheff had singles.

The Spirit led 2-1 well into the second period before breaking the game open with four goals in less than three minutes.

Edgar credited Barski with his three goals. "I guess it was my turn to score. Barski kept setting me up," said Edgar.

Friday in Shelburne Edgar and Barski each netted a pair. Solo scores came from Dane Dainard, Drew Roberts, Dave Zelasko and Smithson.

The Spirit led 3-0 after the opening 20 minutes, then carried 4-0 edge into the third. The Stouffville team managed a trio of power play markers, while

See POWER, page 16.



PHIL BARSKI
Four assists help Spirit tame Wildcats

Health and Fitness

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