

Businesses on bandwagon

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start. Many attended exhibition games.

"We've had a couple of hundred people come to our pre-season games, whereas in the past we might have had just a handful of people around," he said.

The Spirit, which went 5-2-0 in the pre-season that ended Friday, is practising this week for the opener.

Mr. Werek was quick to insist there's no pressure on the Spirit to give a repeat performance. With the league comprised of 36 teams, anything can happen, he said.

"Sure we want to strive to go further than last year because it was so much fun. It was a great ride for the kids and for the fans and the community. Everyone wants to experience it again.

"But it will be hard to repeat because we had such unbelievable goaltending," he said of graduated netminder Dan McWhinney's heroics that played an instrumental role in the club's extended playoff run.

Mayor Sue Sherban has also sensed a renewal of energy generated from the club's success last season.

"I was at the Ballantrae Golf and Country Club (Monday) and people were asking when the next game is and saying that they'll make sure they're at it," she said. "I even met a man at the Parkview seniors home and he said that he was all set for the season and was going to the first game with his son."

"The amount of energy generated by the club has been excellent for the town. They've created a buzz. I've

definitely noticed it."

Mrs. Sherban also notes some local businesses are attempting to capitalize on the Spirit's playoff run last year by taking what she described as a more "pro-active" role this year. Some of these include eateries such as Shoeless Joe's, which hopes to attract local and out-of-town fans to functions before and after games.

Other companies, she said, intend to advertise in the club's game program.

"For the Spirit to be successful, they definitely need partners," she said.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Stouffville Spirit veteran Will Acton takes a break from practice at the Stouffville Arena last week. The Jr. A hockey team opens the new season at home Sunday afternoon.

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