

Having fun No. 1 with top softball volunteer

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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When the Whitchurch-Stouffville Softball Association conducted its year-end house league tournament, Kelly Matthews was in attendance.

While the longtime coach and association member was on hand to watch players he had tutored, he received a pleasant surprise.

PLEASANT SURPRISE

When the association announced the recipient of this year's volunteer of the year award, known as the Carl Myers Memorial Award, the 52-year-old Matthews heard his

name called out by longtime association president June Doner.

"It's very humbling to see the names of previous winners like Howard Burkholder and June Doner who have offered remarkable dedication to softball in Stouffville for decades. Similarly, having the award presented by Mary Myers (Carl's widow) is special — she has been very actively involved with softball around Ontario and is a recent recipient of the Feaver award (the highest award presented by the Ontario Amateur Softball Association). They have set the bar high but at the same time led the way showing what can be done," he said.

Introduced to the association in 2000

when his oldest son Ed began playing ball, Matthews said his first involvement was in just trying to lend a helping hand wherever he could with his team.

After assisting with those early teams, Matthews began coaching rep minor ball in Stouffville in 2002 and continued until last year.

With Stouffville not fielding a team this past season, Matthews helped coach his sons' (Ed and Kevin) teams in Port Perry and Pickering.

But that did not stop Matthews from being involved with the association.

When he's not coaching, Matthews has assisted the association with its league and playoff scheduling.

He's also served on the association's executive as a director, ran a number of provincial and invitational tournaments, acted as a convener for both house league and select tournaments, and worked to help mentor new rep coaches.

Having played the game in his younger days, Matthews said his involvement in softball has been a passion.

"Softball is a great game and I've always had a passion for it," he said. "That makes it easy to want to give something back to the game. I played competitively for 25 years and coached men's ball for 15.

"I have been lucky in Stouffville to have a

lot of great kids play for me and more than my fair share of supportive parents, as well as a valued group of parents willing to help out.

"The only goals I emphasized were having fun, always trying your best and always treating every part of the game with respect — experiencing life while playing a terrific game and maybe learning something about softball along the way."

COACH, EXECUTIVE, MENTOR

Doner said Matthews' knowledge of the game and dedication to the sport made him a worthy selection for this year's award.

That included pioneering a junior development program in 2004.

"Kelly is one of those rare volunteers that are difficult to find and we feel fortunate to have him as a valued volunteer with the association," she said.

While being chosen as this year's Carl Myers Memorial Award recipient was a high point in Matthews' involvement with the association, he doesn't foresee himself leaving the game just yet.

"Both of my sons continue to play competitively and are both now involved in umpiring — and it doesn't take much arm twisting to get them to go watch tournaments around Ontario. My oldest son is showing a keen interest into getting involved in coaching. So, we'll see where it goes," he said.

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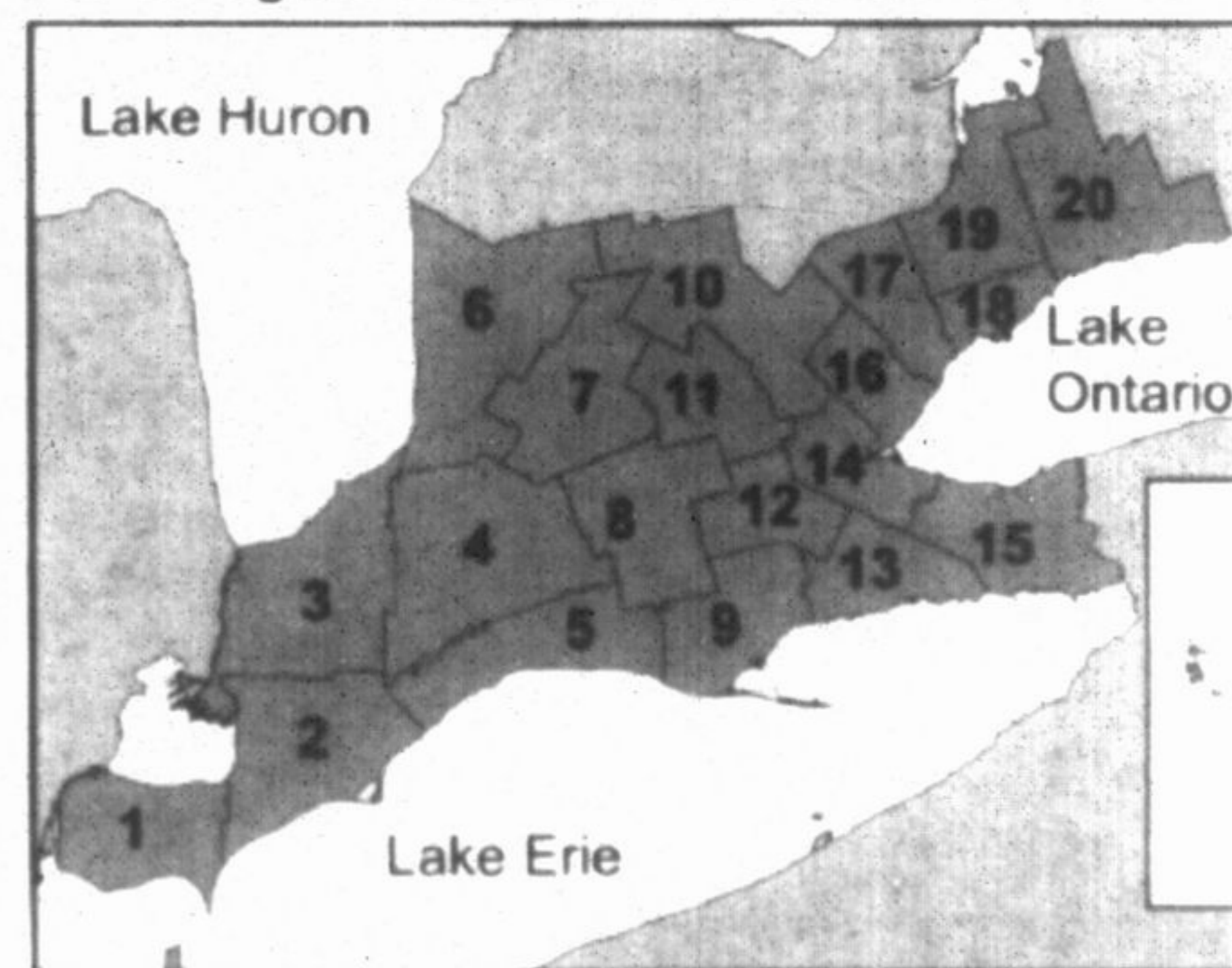
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