

Builders of Aurora sport honoured at 2014 Hall of Fame induction



(Steenhorst receives his green sweater upon his induction. Auroran photo by David Falconer)

By Jake Courtepatte

With the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Induction Dinner a resounding success earlier this month, The Auroran touched last week on the inductees to the athlete and coach category of the hall.

This week, the focus is on those who built Aurora's sporting community into what it is today.

Inducted into the 'Builders' category were Alex Ansell, the late Peter Miller, and Ben Steenhorst.

Mr. Ansell was the first of the three to speak, getting the audience laughing on numerous occasions.

He recounted his days skating on frozen ponds in West Hill, and making his way down to the mouth of the frozen Highland Creek as a young boy.

'We didn't have any artificial ice rinks,' recalled Mr. Ansell. 'But, we still had a lot of fun.'

Mr. Ansell didn't play on an indoor rink until 1952, and the following year his team in West Hill was playing on the first artificial rink in Scarborough.

That was where Mr. Ansell was crushed into the boards by a young Bobby Baun, who later spent 17 seasons in the NHL, 14 with the Maple Leafs.

'I don't remember what I was saying afterwards, but I do remember who hit me!' said Mr. Ansell, which brought laughter from the crowd.

Aside from his hockey prowess, he joked that in his day, everyone played every sport. He brought up the gold medal for wrestling he won in the Ontario-Quebec Athletic Association.

'These days, I'd have to lose a few pounds to get back into my weight class.'



Alex Ansell, ahead of the Induction Ceremony



Suzanne Goobie accepted the award on behalf of her late father, Pete Miller.

When Mr. Ansell wanted to get back into hockey at a later age, there were two old-timer teams in the Aurora area. He and a friend of his decided to create their own.

Now the Aurora Oldtimers, he brought up the original name for the team, unbeknownst to most of the crowd.

'Can anyone here tell me what the word 'aeozoic' means?' he questioned. 'It means before time. We were old-timers!'

It was at this time that he became secretary treasurer of the league, vying to add different age levels to a league that was only 35+.

'It's nice to be able to ask somebody their age, and say 'sorry, you're not of age yet.'

All joking aside, Mr. Ansell touched on the joy that hockey brought to him and his family in Aurora.

'Little did I know when I was growing up trying to learn to skate that I would be here today' over the past 40 years, I've been doing what I enjoy. It's a fun thing and not a job if you look forward to it all the time.'

Peter Miller's award was accepted by his daughter, Suzanne Goobie, in what she described as 'an honour for the family'.

Mrs. Goobie recalled nominating her father for the Citizen of the Year Award in 1999, and although he didn't win, she saw the night's festivities as a much larger feat in her eyes.

'Today his name is in the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame,' she said. 'And how cool is that.'

She commented on her father's unique sense of humour.

When Mr. Miller fell ill, Susie visited him in the hospital, reading him the letter she prepared for the Citizen of the Year nomination a number of years back.

'He then looked at me with his famous grin, and said 'nice letter Susie, but you missed a lot of stuff.' That was dad, always joking and always with something to say.'

She read the letter again at his funeral after his passing.

?For everyone there, it was a sad day, but an extremely proud one.?

Described by his son Gerry as ?having his hands in everything?, Mr. Miller was not one for the spotlight, but Mrs. Goobie was beaming at the accolades her father was receiving.

?He may not be here tonight to celebrate with us, but tonight, Pete Miller is the centre of attention, and our family is over the top and full of pride.?

Mr. Miller was instrumental in the building of the Aurora Community Centre, worked with the Aurora Minor Football Association, and was involved in numerous clubs and other organizations around town.

?These are the things people could see,? said Mrs. Goobie. ?But what people could not see was him taking one more of his children, or taking the neighbour's kids, anybody he could fit into the station wagon to drive them to sporting functions.

In Mr. Miller's spirit, his family has created the Pete Miller Charitable Foundation, raising money for Southlake Hospital. ?He always thought about giving back to the community. That is one legacy he left to his family.?

Ben Steenhorst gave the final speech of the evening, a founder of club soccer in Aurora.

A man who knows everybody, he brought up the relationship he had with each of the other inductees.

?I'm baffled to be selected,? said Mr. Steenhorst. ?It's humbling?I know Greg [Hotham], he used to play on my soccer teams as a boy. I know Ed McNally, I know Mr. Ansell?for years, and then some. I used to work with Pete Miller, at one time I was the equipment manager of the Aurora Tigers. I think it was because I had a truck.?

He had the crowd almost in tears telling his stories behind the construction of the Aurora Soccer Club's clubhouse in Highland Park, building when the eyes of the Town were turned the other way.

?Sometimes you have to bend a few rules,? said Mr. Steenhorst. ?You put up the walls and the roof when no one is looking.?

He recalled a time the Town of Aurora locked the door of the under-construction clubhouse for the winter.

?But they didn't do anything about the back door. We continued drywalling, plumbing, and insulation. It was near done by spring!?

A longtime resident of Aurora, Mr. Steenhorst continued to reminisce about the experiences he had in Aurora sports along the way.

?I've enjoyed many a challenge and successes, and I'm so proud to be here tonight celebrating with my fellow inductees. It's truly an honour.?