

Kitchen hosts Stanley Cup homecoming



By Jeff Doner

It has been a while since Stanley Cup champion Mike Kitchen has played hockey in Schomberg, but friends, family and fans made sure to give him the proper greeting when he came back carrying the Stanley Cup last weekend.



David English's Aurora family helped bring Kitchen and the Cup to Southlake's Pediatric unit on Sunday afternoon.

Roughly a month after the Chicago Blackhawks shocking game six win over the Boston Bruins, Kitchen said deciding what to do with his day with the Cup was an easy decision.

"It's going to be really special going back there," he said prior to Sunday's event at the Trisan Centre. "I'm glad we could take the cup there. It was one thing that was really important to me because I have a lot of fond memories of minor hockey in Schomberg. That's where it all started."

Kitchen wrapped up the day taking the cup to meet kids in the pediatric ward of Southlake Regional Health Centre, along with longtime friends, Aurora's English family, who have dedicated a children's playroom in memory of their son David.

Kitchen is now part of what is becoming somewhat of a hotbed for successful athletes.

After his minor hockey days, he went on to play Metro Junior B for the Aurora Tigers at the age of 15. Then in 1974, he was drafted by the Toronto Marlies in the first round, where he played for three years and won the Memorial Cup in 1975.

Soon after, in 1976, "Kitch" was making a name for himself and was drafted by the now defunct Kansas City Scouts, which transformed into the Colorado Rockies. Then he moved with the Rockies to New Jersey, where they became the Devils, for two seasons. After retiring in 1985, he became coach of the Newmarket Saints, and later spent eight seasons as an assistant with the Leafs and St. Louis Blues.

Halfway through the 2003-04 season, Kitchen was given his first head coaching job in the NHL. He would hold that position until midway through the 2006-07 season.

It didn't take long for Kitchen to land another NHL gig as a coach with the Blues. He joined the Florida Panthers in 2007 and stayed there until signing on with his current team, the Chicago Blackhawks, in 2010 where he would be a part of an extremely talented Stanley Cup winning team.

Kitchen did point out, however, that everything wasn't always roses for the Blackhawks in the finals.

?It's hard to describe, especially the way we won it. Here we are down 2 ? 1 in the game and then we score to tie it up and that's when we put out our best defensive players and then we score 17 seconds later, which caught everyone off guard.

?Then it was like a blur and when you win it's just surreal and you just don't realize it and I feel like I still don't realize it. That cup sure didn't feel like 35 pounds, it felt like five pounds when I took it up over my head ? just a great feeling.?

Having been a player for so many years, Kitchen said his favourite part of the whole thing was taking in the celebration afterwards.

?What was really special was watching the players in the dressing room,? he explained. ?What they go through for two months of a real grind. It's amazing the injuries the players go through and the fatigue level ? to watch them really release that energy in the dressing room was tremendous. It was unbelievable how they were so happy for one another.?

Between raising the Cup over his head for the first time on the ice and then again at home in front of his friends and family, Kitchen has done what every young hockey player dreams of.

?It's quite a feeling. Even when you're a young boy playing on a pond, up against a garage door or even in a rink thinking that you'd like to win the Stanley Cup, that amazing piece of silverware. Professionally I played nine years and now I've coached for 24 years in the NHL and now finally after 33 years in the NHL I got the opportunity to win it, which was unbelievable?it is a tremendous, tremendous feeling.?