

Team owner renews Tigers' commitment to Aurora



By Brock Weir

The 'jungle' is here to stay, according to Jim Thomson.

Just days after the demise of the Newmarket Hurricanes was announced, the owner of the Aurora Tigers Junior A hockey club, renewed the team's commitment to Aurora.

Mr. Thomson appeared at Council last week to not only renew the team's commitment to the community, but also to honour player Steve MacLean, who was honoured by the Town with the Town's Excellence in Sports award.

MacLean was recognized for his commitment to the Tigers and the community that calls the team its own, always rising to the occasion and lending a helping hand to the myriad community initiatives the Tigers have taken on; everything ranging from special bag-your-grocery days at local shops to ongoing work with the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

'I've had a lot of residents say that I'm everywhere, but the funny thing is that everywhere I go I see Steve,' said Mayor Tom Mrakas. 'It is remarkable the amount of volunteering he does in our community and I can't think of a better person to receive this award.'

MacLean was also saluted by Mr. Thomson, who hailed him as a 'cultured, stand-up, professional young man we were blessed to have in our Town for three years.'

The work of MacLean and the rest of the roster, he noted, is part of the Teamwork the Thomsons 'Jim and wife Rita' have worked to bring to the team.

'When my wife and I bought the team, being a former NHL player, we said we are going to run it like a pro team,' he said. 'Being here three years, these players are constantly in our community. We were just at a

school yesterday, we went there, gave a great presentation where we talked to kids about bullying, eating properly, and all these kids are doing ? I call it planting seeds

?The people I know here have been huge supporters of Rita and myself. We have lived in Aurora now for eleven years, bought the team five years ago, and I can't say enough about what the people in this room have done for us, or we probably wouldn't be here. We couldn't sustain it, so thank you for the teamwork you have provided.?

But, sustain it they have ? and it's a commitment they intend to keep.

?We can't have our hockey team leave this community,? he said. ?We saw what happened to the Hurricanes and we need the Aurora Tigers to stay in Aurora. The Aurora Tigers are the only team in the OJHL to make two national championships: in 2004 and 2007. Now that Newmarket's gone, hopefully we can get more bums in seats, more sponsors, and we need to bring a championship back to Aurora because it is big for minor hockey and big for the Town. Our goal this year will be to bring another championship back.?

Over the past few years, Mr. Thomson said twelve of their players have received scholarships, two players have been drafted into the NHL and, at the end of the day, that is what the Tigers club is all about.

?The more people we get on board, the better team we build, the more scholarships we get and the better chance we have of keeping the team here. I love the game and all that but in Junior Hockey you don't make money and it takes a team to make it work.?

The exit of the Hurricanes, however, is, in a way, an opportunity for Aurora, according to Mr. Thomson.

?Tom [Mrakas] and I met with [Newmarket Mayor] John Taylor and it is official now that Newmarket is gone, so we're going to work with John bringing Newmarket down to Aurora,? he said. ?We're even looking at Tom's idea of playing a couple of mutual site games to keep the communities alive, and I think it is a great idea.?

But it's only a great idea if it gets people to come out to a game.

At a recent meeting of Newmarket Council, Mr. Thomson said he was struck by an exchange between Mr. Taylor and another Council member. When the Council member asked for a status update on the Hurricanes, the Mayor asked when they had last been to a game.

In the case of the Tigers, the Thomsons have been working to right the ship as far as attendance is concerned. After increasing the ticket prices by \$2 last year, they are lowering them by \$4 to \$10 a game this

season to drum up some excitement and interest.

?It's great hockey and I think people are missing out,?
said Mayor Mrakas. ?I encourage everyone to come out. It is phenomenal that you
guys are everywhere ? Ribfest, schools, the Sports Hall of Fame, grocery
stores, you guys are everywhere in the community and do so much work and I
think it brings so much value to our community to see these young men out and
in the community helping, volunteering and doing what you can to make a better
place.?

For more information on the Aurora Tigers and to keep
your eye on next season's schedule, visit auroratigers.pointstreaksites.com/view/auroratigers/