

## Aurora hockey president tagged for Thank a Volunteer week

By Jake Courtepatte

One of Aurora hockey's longest standing tenures is being lauded by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association.

Aurora Minor Hockey President Joe Bentolila has been named as an initial volunteer chosen by the OMHA for the inaugural Thank a Volunteer Week, an initiative to recognize the lifeblood of minor hockey.

Bentolila has led the AMHA through a number of major events in his close to twenty years in the role, including Rogers Hometown Hockey rolling through the Aurora Community Centre in December.

"He always says, 'hey, how are ya?'" and "hey buddy," said OMHA Vice-President Peter Harmsen. "That's kind of where it goes with Joe. Once you have met Joe once, you're a friend for life."

The longtime executive was one of just three volunteers chosen for the honour from across Ontario, joining a pair of members from the Oakville and Kent minor hockey programs.

His tenure has also included a stint as president of the York Simcoe Minor Hockey League, overseeing 15 minor hockey associations across the area.

"He's easygoing," added Harmsen. "He's easy to get along with. He's always there. You need anything, Joe is always there to help you."

"He finishes a full day of work, probably eight to five, eight to five-thirty, comes home, we eat as a family, and it's like 'ok, got to go, got a meeting,'" said Bentolila's son Josh. "He's just such a busy man, there's always something to do with hockey, he's coming out to watch us, or going to help my mom at the arena with some stuff that she needs done."

How does he get it all done? Harmsen said Bentolila has "endless energy."

"He's involved in anything and everything that goes on in that association."

With the help of Bentolila, the Aurora program was one of the first to be involved with the First Shift program in 2018, an initiative by the OMHA to get young kids into the game of hockey.

"He has developed so much," said AMHA Head Referee Phil Cosentino. "We've got a development program and a house league program that is bar none, a rep program the same thing, he's just done a lot of things to innovate it to make it better."

"He just loves it," added Josh. "I love it, my mom, my brother, we all love it. It's just something that we're always going to cherish." Over 30,000 people volunteer within the OMHA annually, a ratio of 1:3 in volunteers to players. The average volunteer puts in around 20 hours per month of their time during hockey season.

"The OMHA considers volunteerism the backbone of our operations and without the commitment of time, effort and diligence, the association could not function with the efficiency it does today," said Ian Taylor, Executive Director of the OMHA in a press release. "This annual acknowledgement is just a small way to recognize their efforts and encourage others to share in that same passion."

"By profiling these giving people, we hope to highlight their committed efforts, as well as demonstrate the related joy they get out of their work."