

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Getting Aurora active

By Stephen Somerville

As a society, we have to be generally concerned about children's lack of physical activity and the dietary challenges that many have. I don't see any kids playing street hockey or any kids getting together to play baseball or football in the park anymore.

As a child, I recall playing street hockey from morning until night with my buddies. We would even take on other 'streets' where I grew up. First team to twenty was usually considered the winner.

Maybe it takes too much effort to get everyone together today or maybe kids just like to play in their leagues and want their free time to do other things.

The problem is that this 'free time' - in a great deal of cases - leads to children playing video games on the computer for countless hours.

I am probably just as guilty as the next guy in that I sometimes let my son play more of these games than I should, but he is an active boy who likes playing soccer, golf, skiing and other sports.

It does seem to me, however, that there are more young couch potatoes today than when I was growing up.

Statistics showing only nine per cent of five to 17-year-olds get the recommended 60 minutes of cardio activity they need should scare all of us.

And the federal government has tried to do something about it over the years - including tax credits for certain activities for children - although I don't think enough has been done.

But our local community leaders are doing something with Activate Aurora.

I applaud and salute this effort.

In concert with this, I think we need two other aspects:

First, the federal government should re-introduce one of the programs associated with ParticipACTION - that is the 'Awards of Excellence'.

The physical fitness program consisted of a number of activities which a student would be graded against an aged adjusted standard. I can't recall all of the activities that were measured, but I do remember the shuttle run, sit-ups and the dreaded flexed arm hang. If you were in the top category for each category, then you were awarded the Gold 'Award of Excellence' patch. There was a Silver and Bronze level as well.

Second, it would be great if a company could get behind a Canadianized version of 'American Ninja Warrior' reality television series, which would appeal to the younger generation.

TV contestants attempt to get through various timed obstacle courses where they must exhibit strength, endurance and balance.

One thing all contestants had in common was that they were in terrific physical shape.

I know that my son and his friends really liked the TV series and I must admit that I became hooked this season as well.

I think this type of TV program could be inspirational to kids here and might induce them to get away from their personal entertainment devices for a while.

Even better yet, why not resurrect the awards of excellence program to include some of the obstacle course items that would be shown on a Canadian Ninja Warrior TV series.

I could envision a national corporate sponsor (like a milk producer, for example) promoting this TV program heavily and then in concert with the Federal government, revamping and rebranding the award program for kids.

As a start, how about Sport Aurora developing/sponsoring some type of 'Award of Excellence /Aurora Ninja Warrior' series locally.

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