

Girls? Lacrosse Exchange creates lifelong memories



By Kim Sillcox

In the volatile world we live in today, it is more important than ever to create opportunities for young people to meet their counterparts from around the world. Not only do these experiences create lasting memories and friendships, but they also provide insight and understanding into another country's culture and history. Sports often serve as the perfect catalyst for making this happen.

In mid-March, Dawn Beal-Nacevski, executive director of the Lady Redbirds Girls' Lacrosse organization, received an email inquiry she couldn't refuse.

Barb Boyes, Director of Player Development for Ontario Women's Field Lacrosse (OWFL), had contacted her with a fabulous opportunity for the U15 and U19 teams from Aurora/Newmarket to be exposed to some international play by hosting 48 13-15 year olds from St. Swithun's School, an independent boarding and day school in Winchester, England.

Their Girls' Lacrosse team was planning to tour southern Ontario the second week of July and were looking for one or two clubs to host them and schedule games for July 13 and 14.

In previous years, Oshawa's Lady Blue Knights have been the only club to host this type of international exchange, and have successfully built them into their summer program. The Lady Redbirds, who are just entering their fourth year, and still a relatively young club in comparison, jumped at the opportunity to follow suit.

As soon as they agreed, the Redbirds' organizing committee sprang into action ? scheduling the games, recruiting family members to billet, planning the social events, and all the other little details involved in making this happen.

Since the Redbirds' U19 team is in its first year and consists predominantly of 14 and 15 year olds, the billeting was split between the U19, U15 and U13 teams. On average, two UK girls were paired with each willing Lady Redbirds' family, with some families hosting three or four and some Redbirds joining forces to co-host.

The six accompanying UK coaches stayed in a local hotel.

Invitations were extended to other local clubs to play during the July 13-14 mid-week tournament, and Orillia, Halton Hills, Toronto Beaches, Kitchener-Waterloo, Oshawa and Orangeville agreed to join us.

As an aside, on July 9 and 10, the Lady Redbirds also hosted Ontario Women's Field Lacrosse (OWFL). In total, 62 games were

played in Newmarket by 600+ female athletes the previous weekend, across U9, U13 and U15 teams; an impressive feat for such a young club! Coach Jon Baker of the U15 team even organized a skills competition.

On behalf of the Lady's Redbird club, we would like to extend immense gratitude and thanks to our organizing committee members: Lisa Purcell and Carolyn Wasserman. These two ladies worked tirelessly to assign the billets, organize the social events and Canadian-style lunches, and assemble parting gifts for our new friends.

They worked closely with a representative from a UK tour group to pull it altogether, but could not have done it without all of the local support. All of our Coaches and Team Managers also played a significant role in making this a success, as did the many families that participated during our four hosting dates.

As the Redbirds' gathered in the parking lot early Friday morning taking photos and exchanging Snapchat and Instagram coordinates before bidding farewell to their new friends from England, one of our players on the U19 team, Olivia Purcell, summarized the 48-hour whirlwind experience perfectly.

?It was the best experience of my life! I hope we can take them up on their invitation to go there next summer!?