

Hotham, McNally among 2014 inductees to Sports Hall of Fame



AURORA SPORTS HALL *of* FAME

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Their Legacy. Our Future.

By Brock Weir

NHL player Greg Hotham and soccer star Ed McNally lead the way as this year's inductees into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame are announced.

The two athletes will be joined by volleyball coach Bruce Stafford and, in the Builder category, Alex Ansell, Ben Steenhorst, and Peter Miller (posthumously) in the Class of 2014.

"I am constantly amazed by the amount of sport history that we have and the accomplishments that our sports organizations and our Town have enabled," says Ron Weese, Chair of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame. "These inductees don't just arrive. They are developed, and they are only developed in environments where they can flourish and where opportunities are given to them. When I see the quality of people that we have and the contributions they have made, it is really a remarkable thing that these kinds of opportunities occur in this Town.

"The purpose of the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is to celebrate those people who have done a good job and for all of us to say thank you for doing what you have done. The other purpose of this is to inspire. I hope all of the people who are now contributing out there in this Town look at the people who have gone before them and will think, "That's the way this is done. This is how you do it."

GREG HOTHAM (ATHLETE)

Inducted for his work on the rink, Greg Hotham had his first taste of hockey as a defenceman with the Aurora Minor Hockey Association (AMHA). While with the AMHA in his Bantam season, he caught the eye of St. Andrew's College and eventually secured a scholarship to the local private school.

From there, he played with the Aurora Tigers in their 1973-74 season before being drafted to the Toronto Marlies, then the Kingston Canadians before eventually making his NHL debut with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1979.

“For a kid to grow up in this Town, play all of his minor hockey in this Town and, from there, get drafted and play in the greatest levels of hockey, ultimately playing in the NHL and the Maple Leafs on top of it all – that is every hockey player's dream,” says Weese. “He lived the dream and is a special guy for it.”

By the time of his retirement he played a total of 230 games in the NHL for the Leafs, and then the Pittsburgh Penguins. He then coached the Newmarket Saints from 1986 to 1990 and founded the Hotham Sports Centre.

ED McNALLY (ATHLETE)

Like Hotham, McNally rose from his early days in the area to the top of his field – in his case, the soccer field, and to the Olympics. Beginning with the Newmarket and District Soccer Association, he was then drafted to the National Soccer League's Toronto Blizzard. From there, he went to the North American Soccer League, National Soccer League, Canadian Professional Soccer League, among others, to playing on the Ontario Provincial Team, two Canadian World Cup Teams and then the Canadian Olympic Team.

In 1984, he was named Indoor Soccer MVP, awarded the Scorer Award from the National Soccer League, and selected for the all-star team in 1987 for the Canadian Soccer League.

“He is still involved in this community through the Seniors Soccer Club,” says Weese. “We have had very few players who have been able to get to his level of play, not only in this Town, but also in the Region. He is a very special guy.”

BRUCE STAFFORD (COACH)

Stafford arrives into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame via the flurry that is Aurora Storm Volleyball.

Having begun his coaching career in Aurora in the mid-1990s volunteering for his daughter's school team, he founded Storm where he has since served as head coach for more than 30 teams and over 1,000 athletes. From two teams in its first year, Storm now has teams in male and female divisions of the Ontario Volleyball Association, and more than 200 members overall.

Described by Mr. Weese as a “coach of coaches”, Stafford told The Auroran he was surprised to be inducted, having nominated someone else the class of 2014.

“I was just totally blown away,” he says. “It was not on my radar and after I heard, I was dumbfounded for the rest of the evening.”

ALEX ANSELL (BUILDER, LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY SERVICE)

Chances are, you have seen Alex Ansell around Town in his capacity as a very active member of the Optimist Club of Aurora, but this time Ansell is being honoured for his nearly 40-years of dedication to local hockey programs for everyone from children to seniors.

As a member of the Aurora Oldtimers Hockey Team since 1975, Ansell has spearheaded the Optimist Hockey Skills Competition, the annual Showcase Tournament, and the Canada Senior Games.

His induction into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame is the latest in a long line of awards and accolades he has received for his dedication to sports, including receiving the 2009 Bob Harmon Memorial Award from the Town of Aurora, the Sport Aurora Volunteer Recognition Award, the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, and an induction into the Canadian Adult Recreational Hockey Association Hall of Fame.

“It is very humbling and it is an honour,” says Ansell. “Building the League is probably one of my greatest satisfactions.”

PETER MILLER (BUILDER, PHILANTHROPY, LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY SERVICE)

(Posthumous)

Former councillor Peter Miller is being recognized for his contributions to the many local sports organizations Aurorans continue to enjoy to this day. Miller served as Director and President of the AMHA and served as a Council representative on the Town's Recreation Committee, becoming instrumental in the building of the Aurora Community Centre, which replaced the burnt-down Aurora Arena in 1965.

Miller was also amongst the original owners of the Aurora Bears, which eventually evolved into the Aurora Tigers, served as a coach and umpire for the Aurora Minor Softball Association, was a member of the Aurora Diggers Association, Aurora Minor Football Association, a fundraiser for the Aurora Jaycees, Optimists, Lions Club, and Royal Canadian Legion, and in countless other arenas.

BEN STEENHORST (BUILDER, PHILANTHROPY, LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY SERVICE)

Steenhorst is being recognized for nearly six decades dedicated to the development of soccer within Aurora. As a competitive player for more than three decades on a number of Ontario Provincial Teams ? and collecting a few awards along the way ? he co-founded the Aurora Youth Soccer Association, served as a director of Senior Soccer York Region, served as a manager for the Ontario Soccer Association, as well as a number of other groups in several capacities.

For his work, he has been previously honoured with the Meritorious Service Awards from both the Ontario Soccer Association and the York Region Soccer Association.

?I never expected anything like this to happen,? says Steenhorst. ?I am just a worker. This just came out of the clear blue sky. I would do every second [of my career] over again, just lots more!?