

Ladies get Ball-sy to help out their favourite causes



By Brock Weir

To make a difference, sometimes it takes some balls ? just as the women of the Aurora/Newmarket Ladies Ball Hockey League. There might not be skates, but some of our area's fastest women are lacing up their running shoes, taping up their hockey sticks, and getting their balls warmed up for their summer tournament, the end of another fun season on the ice-free floor of Arena One of the Aurora Community Centre.

But this isn't just an ordinary go-home-with-the-glory tourney ? it is a way creative way for the League members to give back to their own community.

From May until August, the Aurora/Newmarket Ladies Ball Hockey Team (ANLBHL) meets at the Aurora Community Centre, divided up into eight teams.

Until fairly recently, the League would end each season with a celebration featuring a banquet of food, door prizes and awards to League champs.

But, recognizing some people and organizations in the community were hurting, they decided to task each of the eight teams with selecting a charity to play for ? and, if they happened to win the division title, a donation would be made to the cause.

Since 2013, over \$4,500 has been donated to community groups ranging from the Aurora Food Pantry, to Dog Tails, to Walk It Off, to the Canadian Cancer Society.

The League is planning to ramp it up once again this year, playing for Walk It Off, the Aurora Food Pantry, the Canadian Cancer Society, Autism Ontario, Dog Tails, Camp Oochigeas, Sick Kids Hospital, and the Student-Athlete Mental Health Initiative.

?I was involved in three leagues [when we started doing this] and we would always get t-shirts, and door prizes like small gift cards and I ran the idea by the girls to say rather than getting a t-shirt no one wants or pyjamas that don't fit, why not give the money to charity?? says ANLBHL's Lynda Pockett. ?And, if you can pick your own charity, it makes it a little bit more personal.

?Over the years, we have even supported families in the community who aren't registered charities. We don't demand that they be a registered charity, so to speak, but one family had a child going through sickness and we helped out with any of the costs involved ? after all, you're going through a trying time anyway and don't need the extra headache and they can't get support from other places.? Adds fellow Leaguer Katie Williams, ?The teams talk about the causes. I know our team hashes out what [their charity] is going to be and everyone makes their pitch, so that [too] is a team effort and we try to keep it local.?

The eight teams are divided into two divisions ? a top four and a bottom four ? so the champion in the top four division will receive \$500 for their recipient, and the winning bottom four team will rake in \$300. To even the playing field, every charity does get something. The Top Rookie Award for the best newby on each team, for instance, is awarded \$5 for each point racked up during the season.

?I don't usually quibble because sometimes they don't get a lot of points, but it is a minimum of \$50 anyway,? says Pockett.

While the women are having fun planning for the season-ender, they are having just as much fun ? albeit competitive fun ? out on the arena floor.

The League has been around for over 20 years and is one of the longest-running Tuesday summer ladies ball hockey clubs in the Province, collecting active players aged from 18 to 65-and-counting.

?Word of mouth is pretty much how I got involved,? explains Pockett. ?I play ice hockey ? and I prefer ice hockey because there is a lot less running ? but I became involved and now I am left running it with Katie ? and Katie always has her hands in most things to do with women and any type of hockey.?

?I love it!? says Williams. ?It is a growing and growing sport. We can add more teams, but we don't have any more floor time. Eight teams on Tuesday nights is all we can fit in.?

That being said, however, they are always looking for new members to join existing teams and for members of the public to come out for free and cheer them on.

?It is a quality sporting event,? says Williams. ?These girls play some good ball. It is competitive, there are close matches, and it is fun. Everyone has fun and it's free ? and it is also an easy way to get exercise, socialize and spend time.?

The Aurora Ladies Ball Hockey Finals takes place next Tuesday, August 1, at the Aurora Community Centre from 6.45 ? 11.30 p.m. For more information on the game or how to become involved with the League, contact Katie Williams at katiehockey@bell.net or 905-967-3611.