

Legendary cameraman and Sportsbeat Aurora co-creator Steve Mitchell passes away at 61



Aurora's beloved videographer Steve Mitchell—who recorded decades of Aurora Tigers Junior A games and co-created the popular program Sportsbeat Aurora which ran on Aurora Cable TV for 26 years — passed away last week at Southlake Regional Health Centre. He was 61.

Mitchell videotaped Junior A hockey teams—including the Aurora Tigers—for Aurora Cable from 1979 to 2008. He became a station manager of Aurora Cable in 1983 and served in that capacity until Rogers bought ACI in 2008. Mitchell continued to serve as cameraman at Aurora Tigers games for ten more years until declining health reduced his workload in the broadcast booth.

During his illustrious career behind the camera, Mitchell videotaped thousands of Junior A hockey games and the gondola at the Aurora Community Centre is named the Steve Mitchell Media Box in his honour. The ice at ACC Rink 1 may be out for the summer, but a trip inside the venerable arena reveals Steve Mitchell's historical effect on Aurora hockey.

Framed by the Aurora Tigers' national championship banners from 2004 and 2007, the Steve Mitchell Media Booth at the ACC serves as a testament to his impact not only on the Tigers, but on the Town's sporting culture.

A significant part of the Town's sporting culture is Aurora Tigers' President and Owner Jim Thomson. The former NHLer was moved by Mitchell's passing.

"It was a real sad day when his daughter Jennifer called me. Steve was so well-loved and respected throughout the league. He was our cameraman and was so loyal to the Tigers. He was there every game—when he couldn't be, his daughter Jennifer would take over. He was so very dear to me and dear to the Tigers."

Thomson elaborated on his long-time connection with Mitchell.

"Eleven years ago, when I bought the Tigers, Steve was such an important part of the organization. His skills in the broadcast booth came with the purchase of the team. When he took ill, we—both the Tigers and the Town — needed to do something to honor his contributions not only to our hockey club over the years, but to the Town of Aurora. The Steve Mitchell Media Booth seemed like the right kind of recognition for someone who had such a love of sports and such a love for the Tigers. We invited Steve to take his

equipment from the booth?including his camera and his monitor?after he became ill, but he wanted the equipment to stay there in the booth. It made him feel connected to the team and to a place he spent so many meaningful years. Our current announcer Kevin Dean is still using Steve's camera and monitor to call Aurora Tigers games.?

Not only did Mitchell develop a deep bond with Thomson and the Tigers as their cameraman, but the innovative pioneer was also behind the camera for Sportsbeat Aurora?a much-loved community program on Aurora Cable television that featured the stories of local sports teams and players from 1982 to 2008.

The popular television show had an incredible run of 26 years and was created in part by Mitchell and Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Media inductee and broadcaster Lowell McClenny who served as cohost for decades.

McClenny was also Aurora Cable Television's play-by-play voice for Tigers Junior A games and worked side-by-side with Mitchell for decades-- creating cultural history with the broadcasts which are now archived safely at the Aurora Museum.

During our phone interview, McClenny praised Mitchell's ingenuity in the studio.

?I was working as the President of the AMHA in the 1980s and Steve was breaking into the big wide world of sports. He was still at Seneca and was working at Aurora Cable as part of the school's co-op program. Steve approached me to do play-by-play for minor hockey. We had the conversation when Aurora was getting bigger and I asked if we could do a sports show. We started taping in June 1982?Aurora Cable had converted a house into offices and gave Steve the okay to build a studio. We did our first taping of Sportsbeat Aurora when it was sweltering hot in June. Steve had converted one of the bedrooms into a studio?we had one microphone, and one cameraman. Steve Buffery was a co-host who was working for The Banner at the time.?

The engaging raconteur characterized his long-time broadcast partner as ?dedicated?Steve always had an eagerness to make things better. He was such a hard-working colleague?congenial, approachable, and, most of all, Steve was a person who accepted others' ideas. We traded ideas over a 26-year period and we ended up being like family.?

Ron Weese, President of Sport Aurora and Ward 1 Councillor, was similarly moved by Mitchell's passing and praised the legendary cameraman for ?being so knowledgeable and passionate about broadcasting and sports.?

Weese reflected fondly on his many appearances on Sportsbeat Aurora in its heyday and applauded Mitchell's creative talents and innovative spirit.

?Steve was one of those pioneers that contributed so much to sports in Aurora. When Aurora was a small town, Steve helped sports to become relevant and a force in the community. He presented both small and large groups in his programs and nothing stood in his way to promote local teams?their coaches and athletes. He was a strong man with a great sense of humor. I'll always remember him as the great guy behind the camera during Sportsbeat Aurora?a smiling, lively character that was always helpful.?

In addition to Mitchell's laudable characteristics as delineated by Thomson, McLenny, and Weese, the talented cameraman and studio manager made media history when he became the first person to create a 24/7 dedicated High Definition community channel in Canada.

His technical innovations were also applauded by the OJHL's Stouffville Spirit. In its Facebook post on Friday afternoon, the hockey club referred to Mitchell as ?one who pioneered Junior A video production.?

Steve Mitchell is survived by his wife, Judy, and his children, Mark and Jennifer.

A Celebration of Steve's life will take place at the Aurora Community Centre auditorium on Saturday, July 12 from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

Words of Remembrance will commence at 1 p.m.

Donations to the Heart and Stroke Foundation are encouraged in honor of Steve Mitchell.

By Jim Stewart