

Team of the Week nominees show big hearts in Aurora



By Brock Weir

Aurora's U9 Girls are not ones to shy away from a challenge.

The Stingers A soccer team, comprised of local girls of the age of 9, have increasingly become familiar faces throughout the community, whether they are adopting a local family through the York Region's Children Aid Society, putting on their gloves to help beautify local parks, or cooking up new and tasty ways to build awareness of issues within the community. But as much as they invest in the community they play in, it's now up to you to boost them to the next level.

The Girls U9 (2004) Aurora Stingers are in the running to be named BMO's Team of the Week. Support is now being taken online to recognize soccer teams from across the country that have demonstrated team pride, team spirit, community commitment, and of course, a passion for the beautiful game.

Nominations through the Bank of Montreal program began rolling in on April 17 with the announcement of the first winner, and Teams of the Week will be announced each week through July 24.

15 teams in total will be recognized from coast to coast, with the finalist team with the most number of votes crowned the BMO Team of the Week 2013 after a nation-wide vote.

The ultimate winner will be announced the week of September 11.

What started for our local girls as a way to get them more involved in the community in which they play has evolved into something well beyond the original intentions as the girls took the proverbial ball and ran with it.

Life lessons is what we're really trying to teach, says team coordinator Lucy Oliver. We don't want to go into serious depth, but we do want to teach them just the essence of what life is beyond the field.

Their first event was becoming involved with the Holiday Hero program through the York Region Children's Aid Society, sponsoring one single Aurora family in need through providing gifts and assistance to buy gifts to the family throughout the holiday season.

That was our first treading of the waters; I didn't know how the girls would take it, recalls Ms. Oliver. I gave the girls the background information of what that program was all about, sponsoring a family, and when we got the family profile the girls were

so taken aback by events that happened to this family that they literally went home and took money out of their own pockets and piggy banks.

‘It was boots, hats, and gloves that these kids wanted, so it really hit home. It really effected them and then when we went to the CAS, she elaborated more and told them about a little boy who came in and just wanted juice. It impacted their hearts. They turned to me and said they wanted to do more.’

Following their first foray into this brave new world with the Holiday Heroes Campaign, their next events were helping out with the Mayor's Anti-Litter Clean-Up Day after the girls wrote to Mayor Geoffrey Dawe for further suggestions to get involved. They set out on the blustery spring day to help pick up trash littering Elizabeth Hader Park and then celebrated, as the girls always do, with lots of food.

After the cleanup, they put on their running shoes for Strides for Strokes, an initiative with the York Region Stroke Centre through Richmond Hill's Mackenzie Health, raising over \$1,000 in the process, and then they took on an individual challenge, supporting a little boy named Carter, living with acute leukemia.

When they heard his story, they went to their coach, George Georgiopolous, suggesting they dedicate the season to him. ‘Coach George’ was on board and Carter's initials are now etched onto their jerseys, just above their hearts, as well as their banners.

‘His family were just overcome with emotion,’ says Ms. Oliver of their making contact with Carter's family. ‘We went to a Toronto FC game and we paid the way for the family to go. Carter went on the field with our players and held hands, got autographs, and he was just floored.

‘He was sitting beside his parents and what almost made me cry was when he told his parents to move over because he wanted to sit with ‘his team.’ His team. I knew the girls had accomplished what they wanted to do.’

Looking back over the course of their achievements, Ms. Oliver says she is somewhat surprised that the girls took to these new efforts with such enthusiasm, not just in Aurora but also throughout York Region and now into Toronto. They were ‘unstoppable’, she says, whether they wanted to name things, go green through the anti-litter day, or their latest project, teaming with the Central York Fire Services on new initiatives which are still in the works, going down to Ronald McDonald house and putting their passion for cooking to good use, cooking for the families who are in residence.

‘If you're proud to be an Auroran, you should be proud to vote for this team,’ she says. ‘What I have seen these girls do I have never seen before.’

Adds fellow team supporter Sandra Romano: ‘We have 12 energetic girls who love the game, love being together on and off the field, have a love for the sport and are good citizens. They try to do good out in the community and they enjoy doing it. They are always with a smile and when practice ends they want to keep going for more.’

To vote for the local team, head to www.bmosoccer.com/en/team-of-the-week and click on ‘Find a Team.’