

Training centre aims to breed Badminton's best



By Brock Weir

This summer, the thwacks on shuttlecocks ringing out from Don Hillock Drive stemmed from kids of various levels getting to know the fun that can be had on the badminton court.

These thwacks will reach a crescendo this fall, however, when Ontario's badminton best descend on Aurora to do battle.

This has always been the vision for Brian Tuen of Aurora's Machi Badminton Training Centre. Having opened two years ago, Mr. Tuen set his sights on Aurora, sensing a rapidly growing interest in the sport across York Region, particularly in Markham, but things are heading north.

"It is really, really popular," he says. "All the way up through York Region schools are focused on badminton, most of the public and high schools have badminton teams, and I think this market is growing really, really fast."

When he set out to create Machi, his first objective was to find just the right place "and space" where he could create a training centre that would meet badminton's international standards, something that has been sorely lacking in Ontario, he says. The space on Don Hillock Drive offered enough space for eight courts with 30 foot ceilings, and the Badminton Ontario Tournament arrives in October.

"I like badminton because you can play it all season," he says. "It is an indoor sport and you can play with the whole family because it is an easy sport to pick up. You can be in a world championship, but you all have the same starting point."

"That starting point is easy. The court is not huge. If you are a beginner to tennis, it can be quite hard, but badminton is easy to pick up and you can play with parents and grandchildren. We all want our kids to do more exercise but if you just bring them into fitness, I think the kids would feel bored. I want to give them the interest in badminton as a sport and get them to do more exercise. It is better than staying home, watching TV, and they can actually make new friends and burn their energy!"

Local kids are also burning their energy through Machi, but outside of the badminton courts, through a new partnership between the Training Centre and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Described by the Cultural Centre as a "unique partnership that marries sports and culture", the Centre approached Machi to become part of their "Business Partner Program" and it was viewed as combining the "best of both worlds" uniting sport and the arts.

The result is the Machi Training Centre Summer Programs Assistant at the Cultural Centre, providing for one summer student to help run arts camps at the historic Church Street facility. This position is currently held by Samantha Jones, who has helped lead a

variety of recent summer programs for students.

“Samantha Jones was hired thanks to this generous sponsorship,” says Jane Taylor of the Aurora Cultural Centre. “With an expanded staff over the summer of 2013, the gift has allowed the Centre to increase its arts program offerings this summer, resulting in a vibrant, creative output for our community's youngest artists!”

“Through this sponsorship, Machi Badminton has allowed the Centre to hire one more local university arts student to help deliver the summer program, expanding her instructional skills. His gift also meant an expansion of programs serving more people with well-priced summer arts options.”