

## **Sport Aurora winning at getting things done**

By John Cudmore

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It is actually possible for rival sports organizations to share a sandbox. Turns out it can be beneficial for all concerned, too.

For evidence, consider Sport Aurora, a collection of community sports groups that has utilized an all-for-one-and-one-for-all approach to get things done in their interest. In short, there is collective realization teamwork and planning easily trump individual, selfish and knee-jerk reactions when trying to achieve goals.

Let's face it: often the interests of sports groups overlap, so why not take advantage of such circumstance and put forth a united face?

Never mind the inevitable competition for athletes and facilities between groups. It would be absurd for community sports organizations to be at each other's throats all the time. That's not to say there are not occasional flare-ups, beefs and differences of opinion between groups. That's natural when interests cross paths.

But, somehow in Aurora, unlike any other municipality in York Region, sports organizations have managed to recognize strength in numbers is more than simply a warm and fuzzy phrase.

A collection of 17 organizations, Sport Aurora has become a viable player on the landscape since its 2005 inception, capably providing a voice for the interests of its members, who represent some 7,500 participants ranging from toddlers to senior citizens.

This civilized approach to governing leisure hours in town has been hugely successful and has, in a relatively short time, evolved into a recognized and respected player in the community to which members can turn for support in dealings with the municipality that can be otherwise intimidating and confusing.

"We wanted to have a better voice to encourage the fair assessment of fees, in large part, to encourage participation," Sport Aurora chairperson and Aurora Youth Soccer Club past-president Ron Weese said. "Because Sport Aurora has connections with almost all the sports organizations, it makes sense to partner with us.

"I think a lot of people don't know how to make the connection and because of the sensitive nature, often don't go looking." That's where Sport Aurora started, and not surprisingly, since

user fees are an unavoidable common denominator for all organizations.

Now, the sport council is heavily involved with several projects to enhance the sport experience in the municipality, using its experts to enhance the various items on the sporting menu. Weese sees no reason a sports-oriented body can't wield influence in the makeup of any community, pointing to Sport Aurora's participation in all-candidates meetings in the past two municipal elections.

"There's no better value anywhere than to invest in volunteer organizations that are well-run," Weese said. "Towns can't run the programs volunteers can at a fraction of the cost. "It has snowballed. Our model of inclusion is to include as many people who have the same beliefs we do. Now, people are giving us some credibility in terms of what we can deliver. The 17 organizations that have executives and members feel the same way — that it's a remarkable thing."

Although announced last month, Sport Aurora was presented last week with \$204,000 in Trillium Foundation grants, a significant sum to help finance its programs promoting athletics, recognizing volunteers and athletes and developing programs, including one to encourage and develop women in coaching roles.

And, of course, there is significant interest in creating a sports hall of fame to celebrate the town's history through the eyes of sport.

Causes? Take the Kids Can Play Program, to which Sport Aurora is designating some of its Trillium funds. Through that program, a relationship with Canadian Tire's Jump Start program has been established.

"Our objective is to begin a fundraising campaign with Jump Start to make sure all kids can play," Weese said. "Participation is the key. Our members tell us there are a growing number of requests for subsidies and asking to reduce fees, more than ever before. "Our objective is to get sponsors and benefactors to top up those funds."

It is at least worthy of an arched eyebrow that there is currently no comparable body within the rest of York Region, though some communities, including Newmarket and Markham, have seen attempts at implementing one. It's a shame, really.

Truth is, every municipality should have a sports council and very well could, should the spirit move the body in the sports community.

The key is finding the spark to ignite the flames — a champion to trumpet the cause.

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