

# Dreaming big pays off for Hocktoberfest organizers

BY DAVE WADDELL, THE WINDSOR STAR    OCTOBER 19, 2009



The organizers of the Hocktoberfest Female Hockey Festival dared to dream big when they launched their endeavour last fall.

The reality has proven much bigger than even their most optimistic dreams after only two years.

"Teams are finding us," said Catherine Murphy, the tournament's director of public relations.

"Before the tournament even ended last year, we had teams asking if they could book a spot for this year's tournament. It was indication we must have done something right.

"When we asked teams why they chose us, it was largely because of word of mouth."

The word apparently is spreading faster than the area's officials can find hotel rooms.

This weekend every hotel room in the city and immediate area is booked.

There'll be 122 female teams from across North America and two from England (English Senior, England 16's national teams).

"We probably could've fit in a few more teams because we had enough ice time, but we ran out of hotel space," Murphy said. "We had to cap it for that reason."

That of course makes some of the biggest winners this weekend the area's businesses.

Murphy said local tourism officials estimated last year's tournament, which featured 88 teams, generated \$3.5-million in economic activity. This year's tournament should see at least an increase of one-third based on 34 more teams entering.

Some of the teams are staying a little longer than last year, further inflating the economic benefits.

In addition to the two English teams, clubs from Kelowna, B.C. and High River, Alberta are scheduled to arrive today. There are also teams from California, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri and all across Ontario ranging from Sault Ste. Marie to Ottawa.

However, the real focus of the festival is about promoting and developing women's hockey.

When asked why she felt the tournament has exploded in popularity, Murphy settled on a simple answer for success.

"I think it's different than other tournaments and that makes it just fun," Murphy said. "The teams are all elite level and are here to play serious hockey, but there's all the other stuff surrounding it. We wanted to make it a festival, not just a tournament.

"There's a chance for the players to meet. There were real friendships formed last year.

"Seeing the smiles on the faces, I think that's why it's been successful."

The four-day event, which also features clinics and a variety of off-ice activities, gets underway Thursday with the Windsor Spitfires holding Hocktoberfest Night as part of their game with their archrivals from London.

As part of the game, the Windsor Wildcats Atom C team will play a mini-game. There'll also be a shootout competition involving the Southwest Wildcats Jr., Windsor Wildcats AA, Chatham Outlaws, Highwood Raiders (High River, Alberta), Pursuit of Excellence Academy (Kelowna, B.C.) and the English national team.

Among the new wrinkles in this year's festival are the creation of an atom (10-year-olds) division and move to make the tournament more green.

An Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of \$50,000 has allowed the tournament to go paperless. All results will be available at the rinks on big screens and lap tap computers.

In addition, participants can take hybrid shuttle buses which will be doing a regular loop around the arenas and hotels.

There will also be a complimentary family fun zone at the WFCU Centre, which will feature face painting, Wii games on big screens, stilt walkers and magicians as well as free arcade games.

The WFCU Centre will also be the site of a bar lounge featuring local musicians.

On the practical front, organizers will once again feed all the players between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. each day.

"We've had food donated and local schools (Holy Names, St. Anne's) will have students prepare it as part of their culinary course programs," Murphy said.

This year a goaltending clinic will be conducted by former Toronto Maple Leafs goalie coach Steve McKichan and University of Windsor goalie coach Perry Wilson.

One of the initiative's tournament organizers are particularly excited about is the creation of a data base of bench-mark testings for female players using the Next Testing Program.

The program is used by the NHL, Windsor Spitfires and other minor pro leagues to test and gauge improvement of players in a variety of skill sets.

"We'll use the eight older, elite teams in the tournament to create a data bank of information for girls," Murphy said. "There's nothing like that for girls to measure themselves against.

"They can see how they stack up, see if they're scholarship material by comparing themselves to these benchmarks."

Tournament action gets underway Friday morning and runs through Sunday's finals. Games are schedule from 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Sunday.

Games are being held in Tecumseh, Essex, LaSalle, Windsor Arena, South Windsor Arena, Forest Glade and the WFCU Centre.

The area teams entered this weekend include the Southwest Wildcats, Windsor Wildcats, Lakeshore Lightning and Chatham Outlaws.

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