

Mayor's report to city council

Tuesday, Feb. 13, 2024

Sportsfest success

On behalf of council, I salute all who organized, coordinated, and participated in Sportsfest 2024.

What a great weekend!

Great to see businesses involved, because generating business for the city is one of the reasons we founded this February event 25 years ago.

Canalside Restaurant, Eh Amigos Cantina, Breakwall Brewery, and Steele and Clover all ran events to get people out and about and participating. The Hut on Weaver Road joined Sportsfest for the first time to offer yoga and meditation. The YMCA was busy all weekend with free swimming, skating, and lots of activities for the kids.

Sixteen teams from across southern Ontario came to the Vale Centre, for some friendly competition on the ice in four divisions of the Mayor's Cup Hockey Tournament.

Port Colborne Old Timers won the A division. West Lincoln won the B division. Haldimand won the D division, and our local boys, our Port Colborne team, won the C division. Thanks to all the players, coaches and managers who made it an awesome tournament.

One of the highlights for me was Saturday afternoon, up in the Golden Puck Room of the Vale Centre, announcing four new inductees to our Wall of Fame.

We had about 100 people there, to celebrate and applaud our inductees.

First up was Special Olympic swimmer Diane Gannon, who earned 15 medals for Team Port Colborne provincially, nationally and internationally.

Ray Wills accepted the honour for his son Derek Wills, a Lakeshore grad, who is the NHL's Calgary Flames play-by-play radio announcer.

Local boy Kevin Alexander Keith, all-star American baseball player, award-winning gymnast, all-round excellent athlete with almost 40 years directing municipal sports and rec, said it was “good to come home to Port Colborne” from his home in Brantford to unveil his plaque for our wall of fame.

Our fourth and final induction was the Novice Girls' Softball Team which won the 1973 provincial championship. They only played together for a few months that summer of '73. Coach Bill Akey, now a retired history-geography teacher, shared the Cinderella story of the girls who came together when there was no novice team at the time, no coach, no field, and no experience. Everything came together like magic, and the team won the championship against defending champion Sarnia.

It's a challenge to get everyone together 51 years later, even to find some of the girls was a challenge—names change, people move across the country, and some have passed on. Joanne Garner, age 99, was with us Saturday, representing her late daughter Mary Ann, a team member who died too young, many years ago. That was a special moment for her, for all of us, when people rose to their feet to applaud.

It's a proud day for our city when we recognize our citizens for their achievements. You could feel the pride in the room Saturday afternoon.

Speaking of hometown pride, 104 people made us proud when they plunged into Gravelly Bay at the marina Sunday afternoon to raise money for Special Olympics. It was the biggest turnout ever for the annual Polar Plunge!

Donations are the highest ever, too – more than \$29,000 has been raised, beating the goal of \$20,000. Fantastic!

Thanks to those individuals and teams who dove into the freezing water, and thanks to all who donated to this great cause.

I have the Special Olympics 50th anniversary award here, from 2018, to remind everyone who participated: you're all champions.

The oath spoken by every Special Olympic athlete, including Diane Gannon, who has said it many times over the past 35 years. **“Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.”**