

RiverHawks Honoured By OHA

by Brad Peters, Niagara Falls Review
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For 26 years Winston Auld has been one of the driving forces behind the Junior C Riverhawks.

If you ask anyone associated with the team, they will tell you he has been appreciated every single day of those 26 years. Thursday night at the Gale Centre, Auld's many contributions to the team will receive a wider level of recognition and appreciation as the Ontario Hockey Association presents one of its highest honours, the Crystal Puck, to long time volunteer and current VP of Hockey Operations for the Riverhawks.

"I learned that I would be receiving the award earlier this year at the annual general meeting", he said. "It's certainly nice to be recognized. Executives from the OHA travel to the recipient's home ice to make the presentation."

Fittingly Auld will receive the award just prior to his beloved RiverHawks' home game Thursday night [November 17]. Looking back, Auld said it doesn't seem like 28 years since the inception of the Junior C team.

"I started with the team as general manager and kept that role, with a bunch of other things, up until Rob Hubbert joined the team before the start of this season", he said. "Now we share the GM's duties. My job as VP of hockey operations is a lot easier with Rob there. He's a big help."

Between his work with the RiverHawks, other city tournaments and his own on-ice time with the Oldtimers, Auld admits that it's easier to say when he's not at the arena rather than when he is. With that in mind, he thanks his wife Elaine for her flexibility and understanding for his years of volunteering.

"She puts up with a lot, letting me do all the work that I do."

Mick Wolfe, the team's chief Operating Officer had high praise not just for Auld, but also for Andy and Claude Cloutier, who are also receiving an OHA award Thursday.

"I think Auld epitomizes what the organization is about," Wolfe said. "Since Day 1, Winston has exhibited a passion for the game and the players. He has such a vast network of connections in the Junior C and Junior B world, everyone knows him.

"If there's a player available he knows about it, and if that player can help our team, he'll do everything he can to get him here."

Wolfe said the Cloutier brothers, team volunteers since 1996, are also a key component of the RiverHawks.

“They love the game ... and they have such a great sense of humour. In addition to their duties as equipment managers, they use their humour to act as a buffer between the players and coaches.

“They are great guys to have in the dressing room.”

For Auld and the Cloutiers it's not the awards of recognition that keep them coming back to the rink.

“The main reason I do this is because I really enjoy Junior C hockey. It's not the garbage league that it used to be”, Auld said. “It's cleaned up a lot over the years. Now it's a good, fast game that really develops the kids to move on to higher hockey.”

“Being a part of that is a good thing.”