

First youth sports fair held at York River Public School



By Bill Kilpatrick

On Wednesday March 20 from 6-8 p.m. York River Public School held the first North Hastings Youth Sport Registration Fair. The event saw more than a dozen not-for-profit sports organizations from throughout North Hastings gather in the gymnasium with displays, information, and some hands-on demonstrations of what these organizations have to offer local youth. The event was also attended by members from North Hastings Children Services, North Hastings Community Integration Association, and the Children's Foundation who were there to raise awareness of financial supports that are available to families and to help them get access to those funds. Well over 100 local families and youth attended the event which showcased, along with Bird's Creek minor baseball, Bancroft FC soccer and Bancroft Jets hockey leagues, Snow Tigers martial arts, Bancroft Sea Cadets, Girl Guides, Scouts, curling, and Bancroft Broken Spokes bike club, just to name a few. The idea was the brainchild of the Vice Principal of York River

Public school Tarras Humen, who wants to see more youth involved in local clubs and sports. "This entire enterprise arose rather organically out of conversations in the school about how do we increase participation of our 208 students?" said Humen. Through his son's experience with hockey Humen has witnessed the positive power that participation in local sports and clubs can have on the physical health and growth of youth's character. "I've seen some of his teammates grow through their participation in ways that I don't they could get from school or anywhere else," said Humen, "I've witnessed the power of these opportunities." And it's for this reason that Humen wanted to bring those opportunities to as many youths as possible. While Humen's goal was to expose as many families as possible to what is offered in Bancroft in terms of opportunities for youth activities, he specifically was hoping to involve youth who might otherwise not participate in those activities. "These are the kids who in some ways will benefit the most from this," said Humen. This was why Humen invited groups like North Hastings Children Services, North Hastings Community Integration Association, and the Children's Foundation to ensure that all youth, no matter their familial resources, have the chance to partake in extracurricular activities. "What I'm hoping is to help to introduce the idea of doing this, by either making it easier [for families] to see what the available choices are and arranging for on-the-spot funding." One of those people who were arranging for families to access funds was Sarah Phoenix, the youth and family support manager for North Hastings Children Services. Phoenix was bringing attention to funding programs such as Jumpstart, the Hockey Canada Foundation Assist Fund, Playing for Keeps and Strive to Thrive through The Children's Foundation, Kid Sport Ontario Provincial Fund, and the OPP Youth Foundation, because as Phoenix pointed out, "not everything is affordable for all families." When Humen began to plan the event he started with only a few participants, but as word got out the list of participants continued to grow, "We put out our original list and have been receiving regular inquiries from people about attending" said Human who was impressed by the amount of youth activities that are available within the community, "It's kinda cool, Bancroft's got a lot going on." However, not all youth sporting clubs were able to attend the event which was limited by the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board's procedure 181 entitled "Requests to distribute information by outside organizations." The procedure only allows for "Information from charitable, non-profit, non-political or non-faith-based groups" to be distributed in schools, and by extension groups that did not fit into the aforementioned categories could not attend the sports fair event. One of those organizations was the Fighting Griffins North martial arts club who was excluded because they are considered a for-profit group. Shelly Finigan, the club's treasurer/secretary, spoke with a representative at the board, which is where decisions like this are made, who told her that in order to attend an event or distribute material they needed to meet a certain criteria, "When I talked to the board they said that there is criteria that you have to meet before they allow you to promote anything in the school. Your program has to be delivered to the youth, it has to be for the betterment of their physical or mental health, and you have to be a not for profit," explained Finigan, "so, we obviously fit the first two categories, but not the third." This barrier got Finigan questioning about how many other youth centered sports have also been excluded and how they could get beyond the barrier because as she points out, "The real idea behind all of this [the youth sports fair] is to make sure that families in Bancroft and the surrounding areas know all of the things that are available to their children." Humen was in complete agreement with the notion that youth should be exposed to as many extracurricular options as possible, but noted that because the event was held at a public school he was bound to follow the procedure. "This is the first time we've done this," said Humen, "Will things be different next time, I'm sure in some ways they will be and is there room for discussion about this? I think there's always room to discuss changing things and making them better because in the end it's about getting kids busy." Humen said that the event was well attended and was in fact, "far better" than he expected. "In the end," said Humen, "I learned a great deal about the depths of opportunities for kids and families in Bancroft beyond the mainstream, soccer, football, hockey. There's a lot of really talented people in Bancroft who have a lot to offer kids." Humen said that there are plans to hold another event, but those plans, he explained, are still in their early stages. The desire is that it will be held in larger venue like the North Hastings Community Arena or at Loyalist College due to the large turn out, said Humen, adding, "I really do hope that was just the beginning of something that continues to improve over time."