

911 tourney honours local heroes

By Bob Vrbanac
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Although Canada's hockey heroes have yet to hit the ice, it wasn't hard to find some real local heroes at RIM Park last week.

And the first annual 911 Emergency Services hockey tournament, featuring local EMS, firefighters and police officers, was held in honour of Amanda Finch, who was a 21-year-old local paramedic with Waterloo Regional Emergency Services before she tragically passed away last year.

So to remember the popular paramedic who everyone considered a "little sister", local EMS workers started up the Amanda Finch Memorial Bursary Fund going to support a student in the second-year of the paramedic program at Conestoga College.

"With what happened with Amanda last year it just seemed appropriate to hold a memorial tournament," said Luke McCann, one of the tournament organizers and a former colleague of Finch. "From there the City of Waterloo got involved and has done a lot of work to bring the tournament here."

Jana Blythe, involved with program delivery for the city, said they saw the potential for the tournament to be something more than a pickup tournament for people who put their lives on the line. It had the potential to be an annual event celebrating the contribution these people make to the community.

And the community has responded in kind with a number of sponsors coming on board to support the event.



Players from Waterloo and Guelph jockey for position at RIM Park.



Guelph Fire Department in the semifinals.

That bodes well for the future of the event that also featured a banquet and a hospitality lounge for the players.

"The plan is to bring in as many teams as we can," said Blythe, of the mid-week tournament. "It's perfect for them because their weekends are during the week because of the shifts they work.

"It was nice to fill the place for the week."

Donations included trophies for competitors in both the recreational and competitive divisions. The trophies were handed out by the Finch family, and a cheque presentation was made to them in support of the bursary fund.

McCann said there's a healthy rivalry between the services and between the centres with teams from Guelph and Toronto joining in this year's tournament. Waterloo Regional EMS made it to the semifinals of the recreation division and would have loved to be a part of the awards presentation, but were eliminated by the Kitchener Fire team.

"We definitely have our history," said McCann after the tough loss. "We duked it out on the ice, but after the fact we can sit down to dinner with the other teams and celebrate afterwards."

It also helped put some names to faces they see all the time on the job or on a call.

"We finally were able to figure out some names, where as when you're on scene you don't really have time to do that," said McCann. "It helps make those connections."

And that recognition extended to Finch, who the firefighters didn't know by name, but knew the good work she was doing.

"What was really amazing was the little mementos we handed out with Amanda's picture," said Blythe. "One firefighter said he didn't know her, but I certainly remembered her face.

"As a firefighter he's seen her on other calls, and then knew exactly who she was. It was nice for them to come out and support her."

The Kitchener Fire team went on to lose to Toronto EMS in the finals, 5-4, so it wasn't all bad for the paramedics in attendance. In the competitive division, it was the Waterloo Fire Oldtimers taking on the Waterloo Police, with the fire crew handcuffing the cops 3-0.

The Waterloo EMS team joked about recruiting some more players for next year. Maybe there could be a little box on their application form to check that asks future paramedics if they play hockey. They could have used the help on the big ice surface.

"Somebody asked me if this is Olympic width and I said yes," laughed McCann. "I'm certainly feeling it today."

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