

Minor Hockey weighs in on future of NHCC



By Bill Kilpatrick

In response to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the future of the North Hastings Community Centre, Marc Gibson, the president of Bancroft District Minor Hockey released the following statement on behalf of Bancroft District Minor Hockey: "As a key stakeholder and the largest user of the ice surface, Bancroft Minor Hockey is keenly watching the discussions regarding the future viability of the North Hastings Community Centre ice surface. The community centre is just that, the centre of our community and we trust that all parties will work together to find a sustainable solution to maintain the ice surface and its benefits for the whole community." Gibson spoke with Bancroft This Week and outlined some of his own personal apprehensions as a hockey dad and a concerned citizen, about what it would mean to the area if the community centre was to shut its doors. Gibson moved back to Bancroft close to 11 years ago with his wife and two children and said that the decision to move was not an easy one. "We made sacrifices to move up to the area," explained Gibson, who was living in Milbrook, near Peterborough at the time where he and his family had access to a new arena and wellness centre that had a lot of amenities that he and his family were utilizing. "When we left Milbrook, the wellness centre had just been built the kids were swimming and they were doing really good there and we moved up here and we thought, 'Yeah, the kids can't do swimming anymore, but they really enjoy hockey.'" If the hockey arena wasn't here we wouldn't have moved up. We had young kids who were four and six at the time and you have to think about them." Gibson went on to point out that if the doors of the arena are shut indefinitely his family will be moving out of Bancroft to a municipality with cheaper taxes or even back to Peterborough. For Gibson the needs of his, now three children who are 16, 15 and six, are paramount, and for him, many of those needs are currently being fulfilled at the arena. Gibson recognized that the old arrangement with the arena commission was not working based on the small donations from the participating municipalities, and he also questioned why surrounding municipalities did not want to help out when the roof had to be repaired a few years ago. "Paul [Jenkins] had a meeting with the user groups last June where he gave us a breakdown of what was happening and explained about the extra hundred dollar

user fee. He basically said, 'It all started with the roof.' The roof needed \$40,000 in repairs to fix it and the commission went back to the municipalities and said you're going to have to pony up some money and they said, 'No, we already contribute.' I get it,' said Gibson, 'If no one else is going to be responsible then they [Bancroft] might as well be responsible for the whole thing.' Gibson is hoping to see a full breakdown of all the costs when Bancroft releases their report in March or April pointing out that minor hockey alone contributes \$80-90,000 to the arena each year and wonders how much it costs above and beyond their, and the other users contributions, to keep the doors open. Gibson's concerns went beyond just the area, but he questioned the viability of North Hastings if the arena was to close. 'It's definitely a revenue generator,' said Gibson who compared it to the, almost non-existent, snowmobile season pointing out that, 'The ice is in from September right through to April. The [hockey] season is four times larger than the snowmobile season up here, adding that, 'We bring people up here every weekend for the purposes of hockey that would never have come up here otherwise, they're going out to restaurants, they are staying at hotels, they are generating business up here at a time when, if the snow [trails] are crap, so is business.' Gibson said that for some people it's hard to understand the part that the arena plays in supporting the economy in North Hastings because, 'the return isn't [immediately] visible,' adding that if the arena were to close 'everybody would be affected whether they see it or not.' 'We've got a great community,' stated Gibson referring to the ability of the community to come together for fundraising purposes adding that, 'there's a lot of great community members who step up and donate,' and Gibson sees this as a possibility moving forward, but he also recognizes that fundraising for 'operational costs' is 'really blah,' and is a tough sell to patrons and the larger community on an ongoing basis. While Gibson remains confident that the majority of North Hastings residents have a desire to keep the community centre open, he does worry, like Chis Saylor, the president of the Staking Club, about the political tension between the surrounding municipalities. 'There seems to be a huge personality conflict between the mayors,' he noted, and he's worried that this will get in the way of reasonable negotiations. Gibson made a plea for everyone to unite on this issue adding that if the arena closes no municipality could possibly afford to build another facility, 'so what we have, we've got to maintain. [?]' he said, 'We're not asking for huge improvements. We're just asking that it be there and be maintained,' and for Gibson, that maintenance would be easier if it was shared among all neighboring municipalities.