

OMHA honours volunteers for courageous efforts

By Robert Belardi

The Ontario Minor Hockey Association celebrated their third annual Thank A Volunteer event (Feb. 22 to Feb. 28) with far more endearment this year than seasons past.

"Just taking the time to specifically call out how much volunteers mean to minor sports," said Executive Director of OMHA Ian Taylor.

"Certainly, this year is a whole other level. Just because of what with everyone is dealing with because of this pandemic. We've asked our volunteers to do a lot and more than they signed up for."

Taylor, who has been Executive Director of OMHA for the past four years and has been a part of the organization for over 17 years, says he is thankful for the volunteers who had to ensure COVID safety protocols were met and screening questions were handed out.

He said it was something they all went above and beyond to accomplish and he is truly grateful for it.

Volunteering isn't exactly the easiest ask. These are people who work for free and set aside their busy lives to give back to the community. They give back to the game they love and make sure the children are enjoying the experience of playing the sport in the process.

He has placed the whole concept of volunteering in a higher tier than it already was before.

These volunteers threw themselves into the front lines all for the mental well-being of the children, a reprieve from the horror outdoors.

"So, these volunteers were able to provide whatever avenue they could. They were giving them that outlet and that opportunity, it's amazing. I always knew these elements were in play," Taylor said.

"But my appreciation of what it represents (and nothing to do with the hockey stuff), it's the mental well-being and what that means to a child. It helps them balance other stuff in their life. I have a completely new appreciation for it. My whole mindset has changed."

Taylor, who played hockey growing up and still coaches the sport until this day, knows the importance of sport for a child.

He hopes that all of the OMHA programs currently in place around the province now and next year's season can provide a positive experience for all of the players. One day, players now might want to coach or be a part of the game that developed them as a person.

And that's the beauty of volunteering. What goes around just might come around.