



VOLUNTEER WALL OF FAME

John Cowan, ON



1. What type of organizations do you volunteer for?

I have been involved with various organizations in helping to build sport capacity. When I arrived in Huntsville in 1992 to teach high school physical and health education, I was asked by my principal to coach the Junior Boys soccer team. During the first practice it became clear that the sport had never been formally introduced through organized community soccer. Surprised that a sport requiring little equipment and with easy access to idle school and town fields was not being pursued, it became clear that this would be a winning combination to get youth active. At this time, I used some of my entrepreneurial skills to form the Huntsville Soccer Club which became a reality in 1994. This led to me becoming engaged at both the community and district levels in various administrative, coaching, and leadership capacities with the objective of building sport from the perspective of the athletes, the community and the facilities.

During this first year of teaching, I also started to coach my favourite sport of Nordic skiing. I had been the head coach at the University of Waterloo and I was realizing that the snow volume that I had experienced as a child was quickly disappearing in Waterloo. Huntsville was a logical location not only for a career but also to share my passion for skiing because of the guaranteed snow conditions. In setting up the Huntsville High School Nordic team in 1992, I was planning to have 5 skiers but the number of athletes turned out to be 15. As the popularity of the sport began to grow in the high school, I was faced with a similar dilemma to soccer, that is "Where was cross-country skiing being taught in the community?" Arrowhead Provincial Park was a home base for a youth skills program but there was no competitive club program. In 1994 the Muskoka Nordic Ski Club was formed and the program began to grow with racers such as Dan Roycroft being exposed to the club system. In 1999, the youth program and the competitive program blended together to form Arrowhead Nordic Ski Club. I was the head coach for the club from 2003 to 2009.

In 1998, I was asked to become an instructor for the National Coaching Certification Program through the Sport Alliance of Ontario. During this time, I was invited to sit on a committee to create a culture of cohesion in sports at the local level. Sport is naturally competitive and in many instances silos form and defense features are put into place to protect turf. This type of

behaviour is seen from youth community organizations right to the top. In 2000, the Ontario Sport Councils was formed at the Sport Alliance of Ontario to help build capacity in sport through sharing of resources. The timing turned out to be ideal as the National Coaching Certification Program was also undergoing a massive change in curriculum with the Competency Based Education Training National Coaching Certification Program (CBET) replacing the old NCCP Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 system.

Many elected municipal officials did not understand how to prioritize financial resources related to sport infrastructure renewal, as requests from various community sports groups were seeking funding to help with their own specific needs. Finally, new initiatives were being introduced to enhance the sporting experience further. Huntsville Sport Council was established to help community sport organizations work together and I became the founder and chair of this organization. The Huntsville community worked together and identified infrastructure resources which were lacking and I led the town initiative to help build the vision of a multi-use complex with a new Olympic Sized hockey arena, artificial soccer fields and rubberized running track. I sat as chair of this Huntsville Sport Council until 2010. During this time we hosted sports-related educational symposia such as "Reducing Violence in Sport" with keynote Dr. Robert Butcher, "Building Community Sport Excellence" with IOC Vice President Richard Pound, "Building Communities Through Sport" with Cathy Priestner-Allinger as the keynote. We also planned and hosted community-wide events such as the Olympic Torch Run Celebration Station.

While attending meetings at the Ontario Sport Council I noticed a new initiative on sport tourism. As a result of bringing the idea of sport tourism to town council, I was appointed Chair of the inaugural Ontario Winter Paralympic Games in 2006. After the success of the event, I was asked if I could establish the Huntsville-Lake of Bays Events Tourism body. I became chair of this committee reporting to the town council until 2011. During this time, I was able to secure Ironman 70.3 and Ironman 51.5, the Canadian National Pond Hockey Championships and the Dudley Junior A Hockey Central Canadian Championships and encouraged the town and district to be part of the "Share the Road" initiative.

From 2000 to 2002, I sat on the Cross Country Ontario Southern Ontario board of directors as the Technical/Coaching Chair and brought updates on the coaching development transition and helped to coordinate officiating.

I became the chair of Cross Country Ontario Southern Ontario from 2007 until 2011 and helped to create a strategic plan. At the same time, I also returned to assist Arrowhead Nordic Ski Club to prepare to host the Ontario Winter Games 2010 by working with the park to establish a new trail system and to chair the Nordic skiing component of the multisport event. In 2012, Arrowhead would host the Ontario Federation Secondary Athletic Association (OFSAA) Nordic Ski Championships and the Ontario Parasport Winter Games and I chaired both of the events as they were sharing resources of Arrowhead Provincial Park and the streets of downtown Huntsville. The OFSAA event engaged the entire community as they were able to cross-country ski on the main street of Huntsville after the competition, a first for everyone. In 2013, I held the position of chair of the Ontario Senior Games and consultant to the Canadian Masters Cross Country Ski Championships.

In 2008, I worked with a small committee to help undertake a project to bring the University of Waterloo Environmental Studies faculty to the town of Huntsville. As a result, the Waterloo Summit for the Environment was established bringing professors and graduate students to conduct education and research into environment, sustainability and areas related to tourism. In 2009, I sat on the Ontario Paralympic Games Committee review team for program delivery. In 2010, I was asked to sit on the board of directors of the Sport Alliance of Ontario, which I did for 2 years.

Since 2012, I have been chair of the Arrowhead Nordic Ski Club and interim Chair of the Huntsville Sports Council.

2. What is the most rewarding part about volunteering?

I find the most rewarding part about volunteering is seeing a community become stronger with a collective vision of feeling good about the community. A community that enables and supports volunteerism will be vibrant and healthy.

3. What do you have to say about all the volunteers who make events possible?

Community-based events could never occur without volunteers. The town of Huntsville is filled with an incredible number of willing volunteers as we hope is true in communities across Canada. Volunteers are not looking for anything in return from the organization or the participants in the events, but the expression on the face of the volunteer who is given recognition by the town, the event organizer, or the participants goes a long way in having volunteers return to help with future events. Training volunteers and giving them the tools so they can complete the task in a professional manner gives the volunteer the confidence they need to make an event a success. Volunteers need to be treated like 'gold,' they are the face of your event. Thank you volunteers for helping to bring visions to reality and for giving of your time and energy to make them a success.

4. Finish this sentence: I volunteer because...

I can lead by example to encourage the next generation to remember to give back to their community and make them feel proud of where they live.