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Patrick O'Hanlon, president of Kylmore Communities, has joined forces with Hockey With Heart to raise money for several Markham charities. Jim Ross/for the Toronto Star

The guys in Unionville's old-timers men's hockey league have always had goals beyond the ones they tried to sneak by goalie (and Kylemore Communities' president) Patrick O'Hanlon.

The recreational players (average age 55) have always been staunch supporters of local causes. Five years ago, league member Bill Dawson created Hockey With Heart to service local needs identified by the Markham Food Bank. That resulted in an annual turkey dinner program that provides

about 250 complete meals on Christmas Eve to food bank users, delivered by the league's members and their families.

"That got it going," says Dawson. "What moved it to another level was the November 2008 fire that burned down the Unionville Arms, putting all of the staff out of work. We raised a lot of money through raffles and donations, brought in all the staff just before Christmas and gave them a cheque to help them get through the holidays. That kicked it into something broader."

Since then, Hockey With Heart has expanded to help several other local charities. It has sent local children with life-threatening illnesses on trips through the Children's Wish Foundation and retrofitted a house to accommodate a boy with muscular dystrophy.

"We define our investment as the community of Markham and have had requests outside of town, but had to draw the line somewhere," says Dawson. "We'd like to see our example parlayed into other communities."

Though knee issues prevent O'Hanlon from playing goal anymore, he remains close friends with Dawson.

During a lunch last year, the two men noted that Kylemore was donating to many of the same causes as Hockey With Heart. In addition, many of the association's fundraising events were held at Angus Glen, the golf course at the heart of Angus Glen neighbourhood, developed and built by Kylemore's Gordon Stollery, whose father had owned the land.

"They were doing a lot of the same charities as we were. Bill and I had lunch and said why don't we do this together and we'll double everything," says O'Hanlon. "We had the synergy and support. Unionville is a remarkable community."

"This is perfect. You want to have a community leader like Kylemore as your partner and we made the decision to forge together," says Dawson. "Before, we were tripping over each other and contributing to the same things."

The first joint initiative was the Kylemore Communities Hockey With Heart Charity Golf Event, held in early August, which raised \$100,000 for initiatives including B-Strong, Children's Wish Foundation, Pathways for Children, Youth and Families, the Markham Food Bank and Yellow Brick House.

B-Strong was founded by Lindsay Bolger, a daughter of one of the hockey league members, who died in November 2009 of a brain tumour at 26. She started B-Strong to raise funds to benefit brain tumour research.

Pathways for Children provides services for homeless and at-risk children, youth and families in York Region. The Yellow Brick House is a shelter for abused women and their children and a favoured cause of Caley Stollery, a Kylemore director and manager of the Angus Glen golf course. Stollery also organizes an annual half marathon to benefit Markham-Stouffville Hospital.

Kylemore is also presenting sponsor for a Sept. Lighthouse concert in Markham to raise funds for the hospital.

O'Hanlon is looking forward to other charity events Kylemore will partner on with Hockey With Heart — and with his former on-ice foe Dawson.

“By joining forces with community-like minded partners, we can give back to the community and enrich the lives of so many people here in Markham,” O’Hanlon says.

“Together we can raise even more money for local charities. It’s a great way for us to keep our neighbours, friends and family a part of the community that has been created,” adds Dawson.

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