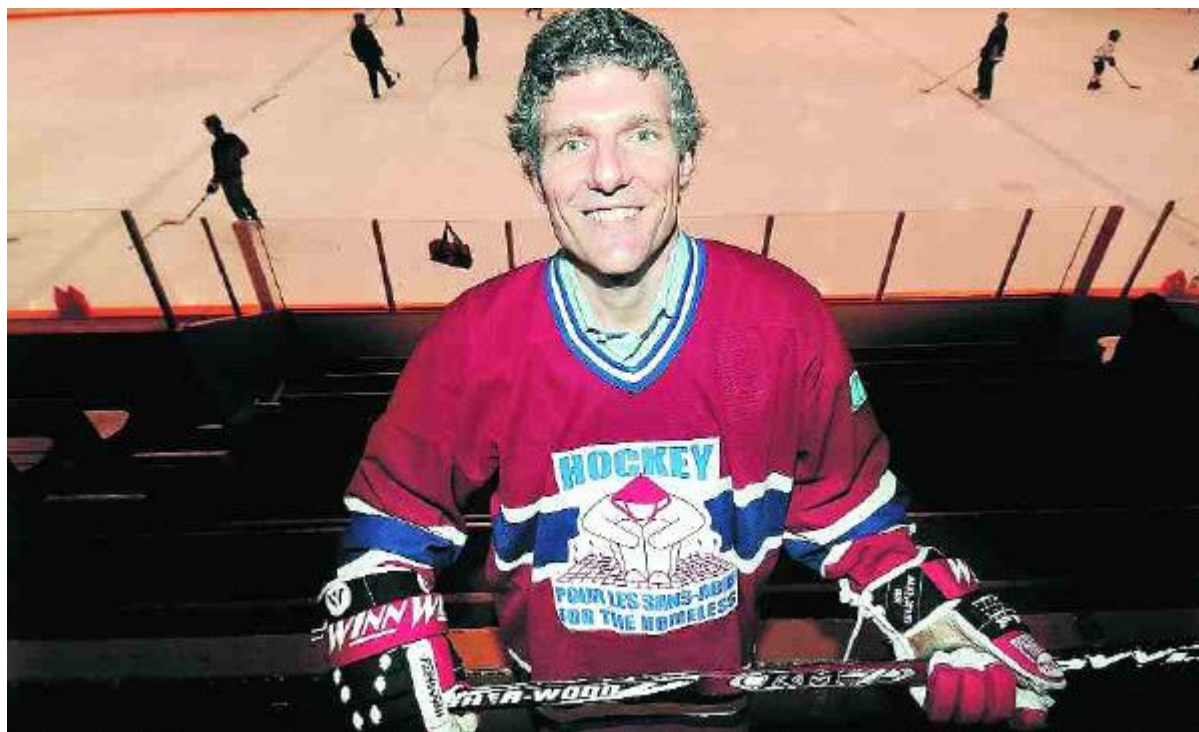


Vancouver hops on board Hockey for the Homeless cause

Inaugural city tournament scheduled for Feb. 20 at UBC's Thunderbird Arena

BY YVONNE ZACHARIAS, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 3, 2009



Hockey for the Homeless Vancouver tournament founder Ewan French hopes to form eight teams for the one-day charity event.
Photograph by: Steve Bosch, Vancouver Sun, Vancouver Sun

At first glance, there doesn't seem to be much of a connection between homelessness and hockey.

Street vagrants aren't known for their athletic prowess and hockey players tend to be the types of guys who have a roof over their heads.

But hockey player and academic publisher Ewan French thinks he sees one.

"They both seem to be great Canadian causes," he explained. "Everyone loves hockey and we have lots of homelessness in Canada for some reason."

So earlier this year, he rolled up his sleeves and began organizing Vancouver's first one-day Hockey for the Homeless tournament, scheduled for Feb. 20 at UBC's Thunderbird Arena.

Although new to Vancouver, it's old hat to several cities in Canada which have been suiting up and shooting and scoring to raise funds for the homeless since 1996. To date, more than \$1.8 million has been raised and more than 12,000 homeless people helped.

It all started when a group of Toronto businessmen decided to turn an annual industry hockey

tournament into a charity event aimed at helping the homeless. The first-ever Hockey for the Homeless tournament was held at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto 13 years ago and raised a modest \$8,500.

From there, it grew. The NHL Alumni Association came on board as a partner to the volunteer-driven charitable organization in 1998. Calgary and Montreal clambered on board, launching tournaments of their own. With Vancouver jumping in this year, there are also plans to launch organizing committees in the remaining two Canadian NHL cities, Edmonton and Ottawa, in the near future.

The Vancouver Canucks alumni has been very supportive of the inaugural event, postponing another activity so it could participate, and there are 16 former NHLers planning to participate.

The idea is to get regular Joes from the business community rubbing elbows and swapping stories with the hockey stars of yesteryear while supporting a good cause.

French had several reasons for wanting to step up to the plate on this one. His mother, a social activist, instilled in him the need to do some good in the world. For the past four years, he has fulfilled that altruistic drive by coaching hockey. This year, he decided to take a year off, leaving a hole in his life. "I needed to feel some intrinsic value that I am doing something good." Hence, Hockey for the Homeless.

He also has a sister who left home when she was 14 to live by her own means. "She is a wonderful sibling who has learned a lot in life," he said, adding she has been off the street for many years, leading a stable, successful life. Brother and sister stay in touch. "We love each other very much."

French says he is troubled by the number of homeless people in Vancouver. To him, it just doesn't add up. "We are probably one of the most affluent societies ever and yet we still have a preponderance of people who can't find a shelter or a roof over their heads."

According to recent figures, more than 2,500 men, women, children and seniors in Vancouver don't have a place to live. Some of them have jobs but still can't afford shelter.

"Because this is such a hockey-mad town, we thought the tournament would fly here even in the [economic] circumstances we are in at the moment," said Nick Rockel, who is handling media for the event. "Hockey is a sport that binds the country together."

Despite the economic downturn, they are hoping to form eight teams with 14 players each. When players register on the website www.hockeyforthehomeless.com, they list their highest level of play and what level they are playing at now. Out of this, organizers hope to form fairly evenly matched teams, although they are willing to accommodate requests from players to be on the same team.

The cost for the day is \$300. Players are guaranteed three games along with prizes, personalized jerseys, lunch, a reception and dinner. There will be a silent auction with items like Canucks tickets, art collectibles and NHL memorabilia on the block.

The organization has brought four big corporate sponsors on board -- Parklane Homes, Pepsi, Cadbury and Molson -- and is hoping for more. The University of British Columbia has also been a big supporter.

French is hoping to raise \$75,000. But money alone isn't the measure of the event's success. "The whole premise is for people to come and have a blast."

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