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## Waking up Whalley's Corner: Part 6

# Whalley's legacy of pride

As Whalley Little League gears up to celebrate its 60th anniversary next year in Surrey, we look at the renowned association's impact, legacy, challenges – and its oh-so-cool hats

Story by Beau Simpson, 8



Whalley Little League's Ed Myers and Karen McGregor say people are proud to be part of a group that has earned the reputation of being one of the most well-respected associations in youth baseball – and that pride spurs Whalley Little League's board and volunteers to work as hard as they do. See full story on page 8 in today's issue. (Photo: BEAU SIMPSON)

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# FOCUS

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## Waking up Whalley's Corner: Part 6

# In Whalley, baseball is more than just a sport. It's a brand.

Although iconic league may have 'Little' in its name, the impact it has made on thousands of young lives is anything but

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

In *Waking up Whalley's Corner*, we delve into the area's struggles, triumphs and what lies ahead.



BeauKnows  
Beau Simpson

The hat says it all. For a ball player, a hat speaks volumes about who you are. Where you came from. Your values. Your loyalties. Your pride.

Ball players don't wear their hearts on their sleeves – they wear them on their heads.

Jason Skellett knows it too. That's why he still has his hat from 25 years ago.

Does he still wear it?

Of course he does – and I knew he would. Because there are four or five other players on my Surrey Angels 30+ hardball team who show up to practice wearing a faded, worn hat from days long ago.

These guys grew up playing ball in Whalley Little League, which is approaching its 60th anniversary next year. And decades later, they still love to show it off.

"There's always a great sense of pride knowing that you represent Whalley

baseball, said Skellett.

"To this day... you reflect on the great sense of pride and happiness knowing that you were part of something like that"

Longtime coach Ed Myers also knows about the magic of the "W" hat.

In his first year with Whalley, he wore his orange Whalley all-star hat everywhere he went.

"It was amazing how many people knew where that hat came from," Myers said.

"I couldn't believe how many times I got stopped. It was unbelievable."

### ITS LEGACY

Skellett grew up in Whalley. He played Little League there from the time he was five until he was 17 and when he was 13, he played on a team that went to the Junior League World Series in 1990.

He still has all his old all-star team jackets and, of course, his beloved hat.

And 25 years later, he still finds himself drawn to Whalley Ball Park.

"To go back to the park and see a lot of the same faces that were there 20 or 25 years ago when I played, some of the same coaches and some of the same faces that are still there, watching Whalley baseball – that goes to show you that pride is still there."



Karen McGregor and Ed Myers say nothing stirs pride in Whalley more than Little League. (Photos: BEAU SIMPSON)



Myers is one of those familiar faces at the park.

He's a face Skellett knows all too well from his pre-teen years as a Whalley Dodger. Myers was the the coach of Skellett's rival Giants.

Twenty-five years later, Myers still coaches. In fact, as a Whalley Little League board member for the past 35 years, Myers has seen thousands of young people grow up in the league, including his two sons.

He still loves when former players, now men with families of their own, say hi to their old coach.

"It's really nice to know those kids did not forget you," he said. "Those are things these kids will never forget, playing in an organization that teaches you to be disciplined – and then they get to go back with their own kids. I think it's something you never forget."

### ITS CHALLENGES

Whalley baseball's renowned reputation doesn't come without its challenges.

I remember guys on my

team telling me how their parents and coaches would show up early to pick up all the needles and used condoms from the field before game time.

I asked Myers if that's still the case.

"It is a challenge," he said, recalling times he arrived at the park to find people sleeping in the dugouts and finding giant holes cut in the fences so they could get in.

But Myer emphasizes that these issues are not unique to Whalley – he hears from leagues across the Lower Mainland who deal with similar challenges.

"I do think the problem here is a little bit bigger," Myers concedes. "But we do get a lot of help from the city and from the council. Anything we ask for, we get."

As concession manager, Karen McGregor is often the first person at the park. With shelters in the area, she says it's not surprising that some seek a place to rest in the ball park.

"They're kicked out of the shelters at seven in the

morning," she said.

There's rarely a problem when homeless people who hunker down in the ball park are asked to move along before game time, McGregor added.

"But it's really nice to know that I do have numbers that I can call and they would be here within minutes to assist – I think that's great community support"

You might think that having the park in the heart of the city's most embattled neighbourhood would be the biggest challenge but in fact, Myers says the community's changing demographic is what presents the toughest test.

"Every year, the biggest discussion we have is about how we are going to get more kids playing the game." In the early '90s, the number of players was 750 at its peak. Over the past five years, the average number is 360 per year.

Myers says as the city changes – and as more high-tech games and hobbies

What does Whalley Little League mean to the community?



**Steve Young** – Grew up across the street played there as a kid, teen and as an adult. I still wear my Whalley gear loud and proud living in Alberta!

**Reg Robazza** – We know the images Whalley conjours for many, but when we say we are from Whalley, we say it with pride!

**Tracy Martin Wright** – My son grew up playing Whalley baseball. He has now moved up to college baseball and is getting an education, all thanks to his hard work and the sacrifices of his parents and all the good people of the Whalley organization. This park is like home for us.

compete for young people's time – finding more young players to groom is always a challenge.

"That's our biggest struggle."

To register your child, visit [whalleylittleleague.com](http://whalleylittleleague.com).

### ITS COMMUNITY

Despite its challenges, the brand of Whalley baseball – and the community that built it – is thriving.

A few weeks ago, Jason Skellett was going to run on the track at South Surrey Athletic Park when he saw a few younger guys taking batting practice next to the track. Instead of going for a run, he joined them.

Turns out, they are college students playing in Kentucky on scholarships.

Two of them grew up playing ball in Whalley – and Skellett now meets them every day to hit the ball.

"It's such a tight-knit community – as soon as I mentioned the word 'Whalley,' the next thing you know we're buddies. Just because of that one word – Whalley."

Because I play ball with a bunch of former Whalley players, this story doesn't surprise me. But there is one detail I find hard to believe.

Those guys weren't wearing their old hats.

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