



## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOVEMBER 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2021**

CIHA has a new look in 2021.

While this is literally true, with the introduction of a new CIHA logo and a new user-friendly and mobile-friendly web site, it's also figuratively true in the way much of CIHA now operates, which is different than just a year ago.

Many CIHA members will not have noticed much improvement, particularly in Senior League which experienced little to no change, but the CIHA Committee and other volunteers have been busy working to improve ice hockey for our members, and I'd like to provide an update.

About a year ago, in spring 2020, CIHA devised and began implementing a 4-part strategy:

- (1) Unite Two Ice Hockey Clubs, CIHA and CMIH (Canterbury Minors Ice Hockey)
- (2) Adopt a New CIHA Constitution
- (3) Improve Products
- (4) Grow Ice Hockey

In this report I'll show progress against this strategy, share some results of our 2021 CIHA Member Survey that convey how members feel about ice hockey in Canterbury, and finally highlight the key areas of focus for 2022.

Before proceeding, I'd like to acknowledge some important contributions made to CIHA over the past year. CIHA is a charitable organisation that runs almost entirely through generous contributions of time and effort by individuals. I'd like to thank the following who contributed over the past year:

- Committee members and others who make the Seniors, Masters, Women's, and Youth Leagues operate smoothly. Thanks very much to the CIHA Committee members who worked long hours behind the scenes to improve ice hockey in Canterbury, and especially thanks to our Treasurer Pip Scotter, who is stepping down from the role after doing a phenomenal job over the past two years.
- The many volunteer coaches and managers who helped organise and operate all our national representative teams: U15s, U18s, U21s, Inferno, and Red Devils.

- Game officials, score benchers, and first aiders, as well as those who update our web site with schedules and game results.
- Donors and sponsors who give generously to fund our activities, including the Mainland Foundation, the Aotearoa Gaming Trust, Spark Business, Cedra Express, Maugers Contracting, Signbiz, and many others.
- A very special thank you to the NZIHF for generous donations of youth gear and turn-key materials to launch our U9/U12 Super League. Thanks also to the NZIHF committee members who provided guidance and support, including marketing expertise that helped reinvigorate Red Devils attendance in 2021.
- Our gear manager, Sarah Redmayne, who worked tirelessly to organise a massive amount of new youth hire gear, and who kitted up a very large number of children who tried ice hockey for the first time. It all ran like clockwork, thank you Sarah.
- Alpine Ice management and staff for being great partners during a difficult year marked by COVID disruptions.
- And thanks to the many others who contributed over the year.

Now on to discussing progress against our strategy, survey results, and a look to our future.

### **Progress Against 2020 Strategy**

#### **(1) Unite CIHA and CMIH (Canterbury Minors Ice Hockey)**

We completed this goal in December 2020.

For the past 15 years or so, CMIH operated as its own incorporated society independently, but in affiliation with, CIHA. At times this structure was beneficial, but in general the positives were heavily outweighed by inefficiencies, organisational complexity, and various other disadvantages. At Special General Meetings in November and December 2020, CMIH members unanimously voted to dissolve CMIH and merge back into CIHA. So far, so good: the merger and dissolution were completed in 2021 without difficulty, and CIHA youth ice hockey has flourished this year, with a roughly 50% year-over-year membership growth, solid financial footing, good player development, and high satisfaction rates, according to survey results that I'll share later.

#### **(2) Adopt a New CIHA Constitution**

We completed this goal in March 2021.

The new CIHA constitution, which was adopted by a strong majority of CIHA members in March 2021, was devised to bring our various leagues and teams closer together to operate as a single club, while also improving areas that were unclear or ambiguous in the former constitution. It also places responsibility of CIHA Committee appointments firmly in the hands of CIHA members through elections at the Annual General Meeting.

#### **(3) Improve Products**

CIHA can improve its “products” (our leagues, teams, and other programs offered) by making them more accessible and enjoyable, by reducing costs (or at least slowing the growth rate), or both.

This will be an ongoing annual goal, and we made good overall progress in 2021. I’ll begin with general CIHA enhancements, then give an update specific to each league.

#### General CIHA Enhancements

- In 2021 we made important systems improvements to position us for the future:
  - We introduced online CIHA accounts that players and parents can use to become CIHA members and register for our programs. CIHA moved our Learn to Play and all youth league program registrations to this system in 2021 and it worked great, providing a better user experience for our members while automating fee collection and other processes that were previously manual and error prone. This system is seamlessly integrated with our accounting system and automatically generates invoices. Why is this important? A key obstacle to CIHA’s growth is reliance on manual, time-consuming processes that exhaust and demoralise our volunteers, and notably our Treasurer. Through automation, we position our club for strong, sustainable growth—and our volunteers can focus on improving other aspects of the club that are important to members.
  - We also launched a new web site ([ciha.org.nz](http://ciha.org.nz)) that has information relevant to first time visitors as well as existing members. Previously it was difficult for someone new to ice hockey to understand how to get started. Now it’s simple, as evidenced by the more than 130 people who have contacted us so far in 2021 using our Learn to Play request form on our new web site. And I’m pleased to say the majority of those are now playing ice hockey in Canterbury.
  - We also upgraded our statistics web site ([stats.ciha.org.nz](http://stats.ciha.org.nz)) to be mobile device friendly so it’s easy for our members to check their game schedules and scores.
- We purchased a set of highly visible red jackets with “CIHA” on the back, which are worn by coaches and off-ice staff during youth sessions and CIHA representatives at Red Devils games. And we introduced a new modern-looking logo, as mentioned. These are small things, but they make CIHA appear more professional.
- We opened a new online “CIHA Gear Store”, offering ice hockey apparel so members can take more pride in our sport and organisation, literally wearing it on their sleeves.
- CIHA acquired 4 brand new goals just in time for the Red Devils season opener and we’re currently refurbishing 4 existing goals that were in dire need of repair.

We introduced online surveys in 2020 to better understand how CIHA members feel and what they want. We just completed our 2021 survey, and I’ll share some important results later. But first, I’ll give a brief update on each league.

#### Learn To Play (All Ages)

- We put a lot of focus on Learn to Play in 2021, completely changing the way it operates, with the goal of providing a great experience for those new to ice hockey.
- In 2021 we offered 3 Youth Learn to Play sessions per week, which provided flexibility for busy families and enabled children to develop rapidly, if keen. And many children

developed their skills impressively in 2021! This is great for the child's confidence and love of the game and helps build a strong pipeline of new players into our leagues.

- We greatly expanded our supply of youth hire gear through ~\$30k of purchases of brand-new equipment by way of successful funding applications and NZIHF donations.
- To build our numbers, we used targeted Facebook ads featuring a promotional video that directed interested visitors to our new web site to book a free give-it-a-go session.
- We introduced online registration and the use of concession cards to make it easy to get started in ice hockey and more affordable.
- The rate of progress of players in our Learn to Play program has been impressive, and many have already "graduated" to other CIHA leagues.

#### Youth Leagues

- With support from the NZIHF, CIHA launched a new Under-9 / Under-12 Super League in which young players are assigned to a Superhero themed team and play cross-ice games on weekends that are refereed by junior officials in training. Children are keen to play and have a chance to be recognised as the Player of the Day for their team and be awarded their team's coveted superhero trophy for the week. Participation this year has been good, and we're looking to expand to 6 teams in 2022. Next weekend our teams will compete for our new Super League Championship Trophy in our first annual CIHA Super League tournament. We're also excited to announce that CIHA has been awarded hosting duties for the national New Zealand U9/U12 tournament in July 2022, expected to draw 20 or more teams from around the country.
- With insufficient U15 and U18 registrations in 2021, we made the decision to combine the leagues, which enabled us to form 3 teams to make it more interesting for players while also allowing our younger players an opportunity to develop more quickly by playing with, and against, older children. While this was temporarily necessary, we look forward to growing our youth membership to offer separate leagues once again.
- Our High School League ran exceptionally well, and we introduced a new High School Scrimmage after the regular training on Wednesday afternoons that provided a way for players—and particularly new players—to gain game experience in a friendly, low-pressure social environment.

#### Junior Representative Teams (U15, U18)

- Expense to play on these teams was reduced through generous donations, active fundraising, shared ice time for practices, and games consolidated to two weekends in Dunedin. We plan to continue to focus on making these teams affordable in 2022, while also expanding the number of full-ice practices for each team and adding more off-ice training sessions.

#### Senior Leagues

- In 2021, CIHA was excited to offer G4 players an opportunity to play in the winter, and we intend to continue to expand G4 in 2022, in accordance with our goal of growing our playing numbers. The number of Senior League G3 and G2 players modestly increased over the past year.
- While G1 had little change in 2021, we're excited about a new initiative for winter 2022, which I'll discuss later.

### Women's League

- After a hiatus in 2019, Women's League returned for a shortened season in 2020, then continued with a longer but delayed season in 2021. The Women's League provides a great path for the ~40% of 2021 Learn to Play participants who are female, and CIHA will continue to support Women's League growth, scheduling a full winter season for 2022 with a longer-term goal of rebuilding the league to 4 or more teams in the future.

### Masters League

- There were no changes to Masters in 2021 (it's difficult to improve on aged fine wine).

### Women's Representative Team (Canterbury Inferno)

- We rebranded our representative Women's team as the Canterbury Inferno, a strong name that replaced the outdated and diminutive "Devilettes," with a great looking new logo and jersey design. Sincere thanks to the Inferno management, team members, and supporters who made all this happen.
- While the national NZWIHL championship weekend was cancelled due to COVID, the defending 2020 NZWIHL champion Canterbury Inferno had a strong showing in their first weekend and later won a best-of-3 match against Wakatipu. With a solid veteran line-up and strong upcoming talent, the Inferno are well positioned to take the national title again in 2022 and beyond.

### Men's Representative Teams (Red Devils, U21)

- We introduced an Under-21 Canterbury Rep team for 2021 that went 2-0 during the first national tournament weekend, besting both Auckland and Southern (the second weekend was cancelled due to Covid). The U21 team provides a path for players aging out of U18s, but possibly not quite ready for Red Devils, to continue representative play, and we will continue this initiative in 2022.
- Turning to the Red Devils, significant effort was made to (1) raise awareness of our sport to bring in more fans, (2) reduce the cost for players, and (3) create a more entertaining family-friendly environment at home games. CIHA succeeded in all areas, securing significant Red Devils ice time funding and sponsorship, advertising the games through a variety of media outlets (online, radio, billboards) that helped achieve record attendance and merchandise sales, and making the games more accessible and entertaining to families by allowing free entry to our youth members and providing intermission entertainment that included U9/U12 Super League games and figure skating exhibitions. Congratulations and thanks to the Red Devils players and management team for a truly outstanding effort in 2021.

### (4) Grow Ice Hockey

I'll emphasize the same message in each AGM report while I'm President: the biggest risk to our great sport in Canterbury is our dependence on a single aging ice rink. If anything changes our ability to use the rink, our club is dead. The best way to manage this risk is to ensure the success of our most important partner, Alpine Ice. We need to have good, affordable products so current members stay in CIHA, and we additionally need marketing and grass roots efforts to raise awareness of our sport and grow our numbers. More members mean that we support Alpine more, our current members bear less of the fixed costs of running CIHA (since we have

more people paying membership fees), we build the pipeline of youth players entering our representative teams, we can field more teams in our various leagues to make competitions more enjoyable, and we make progress toward justifying construction of a second ice rink.

CIHA membership has mostly been flat over the past decade, with year-to-year fluctuations, while other regions have grown very significantly. This has contributed to increased member cost, poor CIHA representative team performance, and overall club stagnation. We need to do much better.

The good news is that CIHA's efforts to spark growth in 2021 have begun to work. Our 2021 player numbers are at an all-time high since we began reporting membership to the NZIHF, with more than 500 people playing ice hockey in Canterbury, up from around 367 reported just two years ago. The increase was propelled by our Learn to Play and Youth programs, with a more than 50% year-over-year increase. Even better, this growth has been accompanied by high levels of youth player satisfaction, which brings me to the results of our 2021 survey.

### 2021 CIHA Member Survey Results Summary

CIHA conducted its second annual member survey in October 2021, collecting 215 responses, significantly more than the 159 responses in 2020. The anonymous survey asked members to rate their feeling toward various aspects of ice hockey in Canterbury. High-level results are shown below, including an "Overall Happiness" measure, which is the average of all scores.

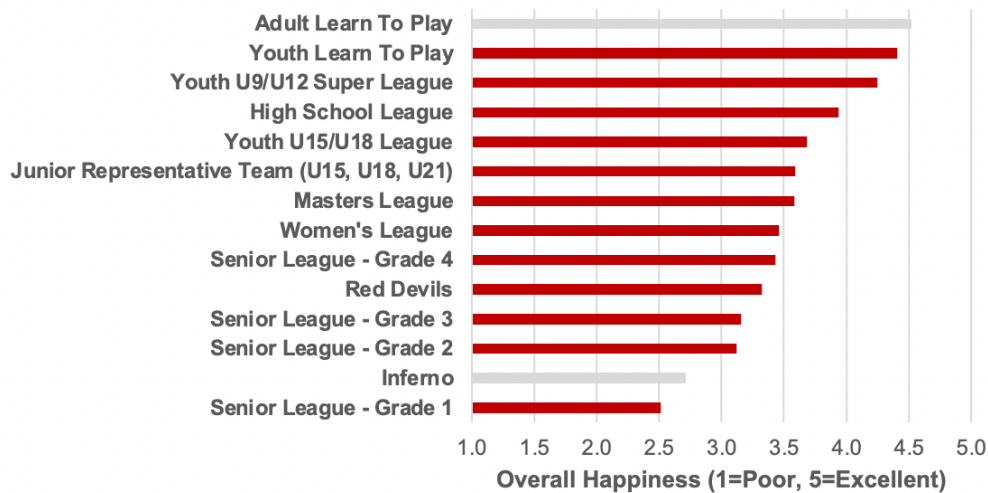
Apart from a very small reduction in the feeling toward Alpine Ice, CIHA members, on average, feel better about just about everything in 2021 than in 2020.

(1=Poor, 5=Excellent)		
What Is Your Feeling Toward...	2020	2021
Ice Times	3.1	3.6
Value for Money	3.1	3.3
Your League/Team	3.5	4.1
Game Officials	*	3.5
Alpine Ice	2.8	2.7
NZIHF	3.1	3.6
CIHA	2.9	3.7
<b>Overall Happiness (Average of Scores)</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.5</b>

\* = Game Officials question was added in 2021

The survey also asked respondents to select their primary league of participation in 2021 to try to shed some light on how members in each league feel. Some leagues had few responses (3 for Adult Learn to Play and Inferno for example), so the results have little statistical significance. But most leagues had a reasonable sample size and comparing the overall happiness of the leagues provides insight, as seen in the chart below.

### Happiness By Primary League (gray bars indicate fewer than 5 responses)



There's clearly room for improvement in many of our leagues, but our Grade 1 Senior League is in the direst need. This isn't news to some: many long-term players in Grade 1 know there have been challenges in recent years and have taken action to try to improve the league, experimenting with various formats, but with limited success. The good news is CIHA is aware of this challenge and has already been working on it—and the survey results underscore what was already suspected. This brings me to the plan for 2022.

#### Areas of Focus for 2022 and Beyond

Our first and foremost goal is to continue to grow our membership in 2022.

At the same time, we need work to improve the satisfaction of our current members. Unfortunately, I'm sorry to say that we face a headwind: the cost of ice hockey will increase, since CIHA's cost of renting ice from Alpine Ice will increase by more than 10% in 2022. Like many New Zealand businesses, Alpine Ice is facing significant cost increases, including above-average inflation, rising labour costs, and a very large increase in energy costs for 2022. Alpine Ice has little choice but to increase ice prices, and CIHA in turn has little choice but to increase the cost of playing ice hockey. In 2022, the CIHA will strive to identify ways to blunt these rising costs, particularly with increasing focus on seeking funding opportunities for ice time.

Importantly, if CIHA can make ice hockey more enjoyable for our members, we can provide better value for the money paid. While satisfaction among our youth members skyrocketed in 2021 versus 2020, we now need to focus on developing other parts of our club, and especially our Grade 1 League, as discussed.

I'm therefore pleased to announce that CIHA, in collaboration with the NZIHF, intend to introduce a Canterbury Premier Hockey League (CPHL) in winter 2022, which will be our regional chapter of a broader national effort by the NZIHF to elevate adult club play and foster cross-regional competitions and community. The CPHL will replace our existing "SNC Grade

1” during the winter playing season, although the current G1 teams will continue with a “play with your mates” format in summer, as always.

Key features of the CPHL are expected to include:

- High level of competition in a non-checking format
- 4 new teams, with new logos and jerseys, competing Tuesday nights in winter 2022
- Current G1 players and members of our adult representative teams, including the Red Devils, eligible to register
- Players register online as individuals before the season begins
- Teams formed through a draft, with the managers selecting their teams
- More meaningful end-of season playoffs, with prizes awarded
- End-of-season competitions / events across regions
- As the CPHL develops, CIHA may seek promotional opportunities to build a fan base within Canterbury

## Concluding Remarks

We’ve made good progress against our strategy in 2021, and I’m excited for the potential of our club in 2022 and beyond.

I’m especially excited to be involved with CIHA in 2022, which marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formal founding of our club, which is the oldest ice hockey organisation in New Zealand. To celebrate this special milestone, CIHA is adopting a special 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo for use in 2022, with accompanying merchandise. We will also be hosting some special events in 2022 to celebrate our current members, and to recognize and honour those who have been part of our great club in years past.

Onwards and upwards, and we’ll see you at the rink.

Kind Regards,

Tom Fontaine  
President, Canterbury Ice Hockey Association

