



CLP Sports in Clarkson is looking for new owners to take over for longtime co-owner Gary Hill, who is retiring after 17 years of operating the store. Staff photo by Iain Colpitts

Owner wanted: CLP Sports packing up shop

By Iain Colpitts

icolpitts@mississauga.ca

Wanted: A new business owner to carry a 42-year-old Clarkson/Lorne Park retail icon forward for the next generation of developing athletes.

Qualifications: Must have a vision for the future and demonstrate an ability to go above and beyond in customer service and product knowledge.

After 22 years of working at CLP Sports on Lakeshore Rd. W., co-owner Gary Hill has decided to retire. The business recently went up for sale and Hill and business partner Nick Conforti are hoping to find someone who will show the same passion and commitment they've shown through their tenure.

"(The customers and suppliers) rely a lot on me," said Hill, who turns 68 next month.

"It's not going to be easy for me to leave them unless I feel confident enough that there's someone who gives a hoot to continue taking care of them.

"My wife is our accountant and she wants to retire too. It's difficult for (Nick) to carry on by himself, so we knew this was going to be something that happened eventu-

ally, and now the time is here."

The business has existed along the Lakeshore strip since 1972. It was previously known as CWS Sports before Hill and Conforti, 43, reopened the store after the death of Rob Walton, the shop's original owner.

It sounds like big shoes for a new owner to fill, but not to worry, Hill and Conforti said — they have worked with their realtor, Heather MacDonald, to create a transition plan to help guide the owner into their role.

The store operates with four staff members, with an extra part-timer or two during the hectic hockey season. As part of the transition plan, certain staff can stay on for a period of time.

"We feel the need to keep it going forward because those people find their way back here," Conforti said.

"We've had moms and dads who have been here with their kids and they'd tell their kids this is where daddy bought his stuff. People want to see more of that."

The store caters mostly to hockey and lacrosse players, but also carries football and baseball equipment. Hill and Conforti work with a wide range of teams in Mis-

sisauga and the surrounding area to meet their equipment/uniform needs.

Several pro hockey players, such as Jason Spezza, Ryan Strome and Steve Pinizzotto were outfitted by CLP Sports as youngsters and still visit the shop whenever they're home for the summer.

Conforti remembers watching the NHL drafts over the years with pride knowing that there are a few old customers in the mix who will get picked.

"It's like they're one of our own (children) because we've known them for so long," Conforti said. "We've known some of them since they were three or four and now they're 17 or 18 getting drafted, so that's a 14-year relationship."

Hill prides himself on the relationships he forms with customers. He speaks highly of the store's skate sharpening service as well.

"We've had people come here for a skate sharpening when the snow is up to your eyes," he said. "Some people will come from as far away as Milton or Georgetown because they've been to places where there's some kid grinding away, but not putting any edge on for you and a lot of people get fed up with that. In the skate sharp-

ening and repair department, no one can touch us, that I can guarantee you."

Because of the nature of CLP's client base, the shop has a bright future. Many customers grow up and become customers once again as soon as their children are ready to play competitive sports.

And if you think it's the kind of place where you just zip in to grab a hockey stick, think again.

Conforti says some customers spend up to an hour and a half chatting with him once they've found what they need.

Hill believes that connection can't be matched by any of the major retail chains.

"One of the things we've found out over the years is customers we've picked up because of bad experiences with big box stores and the way they do things," he said.

"We've inherited them because of their screw ups and there's more and more of that going on. They're dropping onto our laps because they have friends who've said I know where you can go: CLP."

For more information on the store, contact Heather MacDonald of Keller Williams Realty Solutions at 416-305-6159 or heather@heathermac.ca