

Paddle club ramping up for first full season

BY MARY BETH HARTILL

The Muskoka Paddle Club is making headway on their first season as a club.

The club was the brainchild of Sandy Schofield, organizer of the Great Muskoka Paddling Experience, which he said has grown since it began in 2011 to include 211 participants, but still only 10 to 15 per cent of those paddlers were local. This was disappointing to Schofield, who began gathering like-minded paddlers around him to begin the Muskoka Paddle Club.

Jackie Mitchell, a former Paralympic swimmer, and Rick Mroz, the former commodore from the London paddle club, were two such like-minded individuals. The threesome sung the praises and benefits of the paddle club during a packed public information session at the Bracebridge Sportsplex conference room on Jan. 6.

The board of directors has only been together for a few months and they are already setting sail on a number of initiatives for the first summer season, including youth programs and becoming members in Canoe Kayak Canada, as part of their western Canada division, as well as Kayak Ontario. They are also

hoping to arrange day trips to explore the waters of Muskoka, and hold some clinics.

The current focus is on recreational canoeing and kayaking but they hope to start up sprint and Olympic marathon in the future.

"There is quite a lot of interest in whitewater, which is also an Olympic sport," said Mroz.

With the help of the Muskoka Rowing Club and the Town of Bracebridge, they have secured space at Kelvin Grove Park and will have use of the stone building there. They are currently seeking approval from the town to erect a chain-link fence they can use as a compound to store some of their equipment.

"Eventually we hope to have paddlers that will go to the national championships or even the Olympics," said Mitchell.

In addition to members, the group is looking for volunteers to take part as tour directors, event organizers and people who can make repairs to the crafts.

For more information about how to join visit muskokapaddle.club.