

Access to Seneca's campuses is limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic (<https://inside.senecacollege.ca/health>). There is a stay-at-home order (<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60396/stay-at-home-order-extended-in-toronto-and-peel-public-health-regions-along-with-north-bay-parry-sou>) in effect for Toronto and Peel Region. Seneca's on-campus activities for winter 2021 will continue as scheduled.

Information about critical dates and program delivery for the Summer 2021 (<https://inside.senecacollege.ca/programs/summer2021/index.html>) term is now available.

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Hockey professors excited as puck drops for NHL playoffs

Trio shares thoughts after pandemic sends season to the penalty box

Aug. 6, 2020

The NHL is back on ice in Toronto this month amid the pandemic and three Seneca professors have front-row seats to witnessing history in the making.

Phil Pritchard, Kevin Shea and Peter Jagla teach the popular Hockey Hall of Fame Presents (<https://www.senecacollege.ca/ssos/find/CAN699/current/ce>) course at Seneca. The three also work for the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto — home of the Stanley Cup and one of two Canadian hub cities for the NHL's return to action.

"This COVID-19 isn't a laughing matter and we all have to take it seriously, but it's a unique time and the return to play is exciting not only for hockey," said Mr. Pritchard, Vice-President of the Resource Centre and Curator at the Hockey Hall of Fame.

"The world of entertainment and sport has always been a diversion and that's really important especially now. Once we get through this, we'll have more content for our course at Seneca. We are going to have a whole new chapter."

Perhaps better known as "Keeper of the Cup," Mr. Pritchard has had a close and personal relationship with hockey's biggest and most famous prize since 1988. He and the Stanley Cup have appeared in television shows and commercials, including MasterCard's "priceless" ads. They travel about 180 days a year.

"We've been to 28 countries now," he said.

At the end of each season's final game, Mr. Pritchard puts on his white gloves and walks the Stanley Cup out onto the red carpet to centre ice to be presented to the NHL champions, an honour he has performed since 1994.





Phil Pritchard, a.k.a. "Keeper of the Cup," teaches at Seneca and walks the Stanley Cup to centre ice at the end of each season's final game. (Photo: submitted)

If the Stanley Cup final takes place as scheduled, it will be the first time the championship is played without fans.

"I'm sure it'll feel different in an empty stadium," Mr. Pritchard said. "But it'll still be exciting and nervous. I'd be lying if I said I don't have chills going down my spine every time I walk out to centre ice. It's the greatest trophy in sport."

Hockey Hall of Fame Presents

This is not the first time a pandemic has altered the course of a hockey season. In 1919, the Stanley Cup final was cancelled because of the Spanish flu.

"There have been a couple of lockouts plus one-offs where teams had mumps or some things like that and a few players had to be taken out of the game to self-isolate," said Mr. Shea, Editorial and Education Facilitator at the Hockey Hall of Fame's D.K. "Doc" Seaman Hockey Resource Centre.

"Nothing has ever stopped the NHL from playing for the Stanley Cup in the last 101 years, neither the death of kings and queens nor of presidents of the United States."

A hockey researcher and author of 17 books (<http://kevinsheahockey.com/books/>), Mr. Shea started the Hockey Hall of Fame Presents course at Seneca with Mr. Pritchard in 2003. The then in-person class moved online a couple of years later and Mr. Shea taught it solo until a few years ago, when enrolment expanded and the course offering multiplied by three. Mr. Pritchard and Mr. Jagla, both vice-presidents at the Hockey Hall of Fame, were added to teach the course.

"The course is not just talking about the game you saw on TV last night," Mr. Shea said. "Among other things, students learn about hockey's history, marketing and merchandising, and its impact on the economy. Hockey is a sport but it is also a serious business."



Kevin Shea has authored 17 books on hockey. He has been teaching the Hockey Hall of Fame Presents course at Seneca since 2003. (Photo: submitted)

Mr. Jagla agrees. He is Vice-President of Marketing and Attraction Services at the Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum.

"There's a strong marketing element intertwined with hockey history, from the globalization of the game to the development of the female game," he said.

"Everything has to adhere to the changing culture of the game, and that whole relationship between the fans and the games has altered. It's about connectivity. That's the most important element that we have to fall on during this time. We have the ability to connect through hockey and through this pandemic."

And that, Mr. Jagla says, is evident among his students.

"The interactive curriculum of our course allows people to share their personal experiences and opinions," he said. "They look at ways to compare and add to the storyline. It's lovely to see that. There's such a willingness and protocol to learn together. That's the culture of hockey. They may have different teams they cheer for but they are here to learn together."

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