

Recreation centres the heartbeat of Manitoba communities

By Terry Ross



Pilot Mound volunteers working on their Millennium Recreation Complex

WE CAN HAVE our spiritual needs met at our respective places of worship; we can learn and have town hall meetings in our schools; and we can purchase necessary goods and services at local businesses in town. However, there is nothing that brings Manitobans together as much as a hockey game, a curling bonspiel, a swim meet, a social, or a concert. And where are these events held? That's right, at the local recreation centre.

There are a number of newer 'rec' centres in the province that stand as shining examples of what is possible when a community really pulls together. This article will discuss five rec centres – two have been around for a few years (Selkirk Arena and Altona Aquatic Centre), one just opened its arena component last April (Dauphin), one is hoping to open for the '07-'08 hockey season (Pilot Mound Millennium Recreation Complex), and one is in the initial planning stages (Portage la Prairie Rec Centre). Here are their stories.

Selkirk Arena

When discussing new 'rec' centres, Selkirk Arena is the veteran of the group and a true trailblazer. Completed in 1990, the complex contains an 85 x 200 ft. ice sheet and seats

3,000 spectators. The arena's claim-to-fame is a geothermal pump system that offers energy efficiency and environmental benefits in its state-of-the-art heating and cooling system.

City of Selkirk CAO **Chris Luellman** told *The Leader*, "As rural Manitobans have learned, a community centre can quickly become the heartbeat of a community. Selkirk Arena is a jewel, admired by most other communities."

Chris said the arena has contributed greatly to 'putting Selkirk on the map.' "Most Manitobans have heard of our facility. It has been the site of numerous national and international hockey championships and, in fact, will help host the IIHF World Women's Hockey Championships this April 3 to 10. It has even hosted the Juno Awards."

Altona Aquatic Centre

The 35,000 sq. ft. Altona Aquatic Centre opened to the public on June 10, 2000 at a cost of \$950,000. The Aquatic Centre provides Altona residents and visitors with a vast array of water-based activities. Features of the centre include:

- Junior Olympic pool
- Wading pool and water play area for youngsters

- Massive water slide
- Diving board
- Water cannons
- Jumbo spraying sunflower
- Beach volleyball courts
- Pool house that includes changing rooms, bathrooms, showers and lockers
- Poolside concession stand
- Recreation offices

When the issue was first raised in the community about the feasibility of such a centre, wise heads prevailed and **Jack Harper**, former head of the University of Manitoba's Recreation Department, was hired to produce a green space survey and feasibility study. According to **Ron Epp**, Recreational Services Manager for the Town of Altona & Area, it was money very well spent. "It gave us a blueprint to follow and it got everyone on the same page," he said. "I feel it was key to the entire process. Once we knew where we were headed, the entire community climbed on board, especially in the area of fundraising."

To take Altona's recreation plans into the 21st Century, a Millennium Plan committee was formed consisting of five smaller committees. One of these was the fundraising committee, whose members devised a plan



After eight years and a total community effort, Pilot Mound has its rec centre.



to raise revenue by means of two streams: individual and corporate. Through events such as an annual fundraising dinner and a telephone blitz; a pledge program for individuals, families and companies that extended up to five years in duration; and a couple of grants from senior levels of government; the target was achieved.

Asked what the Aquatic Centre has meant for the community, Ron said, "Since the centre opened, we have had to more than double the size of our neighbouring campground from 150 sites to 400. And we had to initiate a reservation system to accommodate the demand." Ron added that families residing in the campground will spend a good part of their time at the Aquatic Centre, but they are also downtown shopping, eating in local

restaurants, having their vehicles serviced at local facilities, and so on. In short, this facility is much more than an aquatic centre.

Pilot Mound Millennium Recreation Complex

In 1999, Pilot Mound found itself with a recreational infrastructure deficit. Its curling rink and hockey arena were both over 50-years-old and in need of costly repairs. Interested parties expressed the need for a complex that could house both facilities.

Soon, representatives from the day care centre and the community theatre came forward expressing a similar need for new facilities. Other groups expressed the need for a fitness centre with an indoor walking track. After much

discussion, a decision was made to construct a multiplex to encompass all of these needs, and the Pilot Mound Recreation Complex project was born.

Around the same time, news came that the recreation complex in Sun Dance, site of the former Manitoba Hydro town built for employees while the Limestone Generating Station was being built on the Nelson River, was for sale. Pilot Mound purchased the Sun Dance facility for \$25,000. Volunteers made the 12-hour trip north, dismantled the Sun Dance complex, and transported it back to their picturesque community in the Pembina Valley. It was backbreaking and risky work – but those who were involved saw it as a rewarding adventure.

The building committee applied green building technology wherever possible. Any

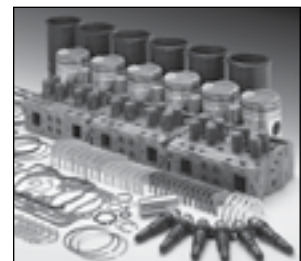


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materials from the north that could not be reused were sold. Construction was divided into a series of phases. Phase 1 involved the construction of the concrete foundation, gravel compaction, other ground installations and the erection of the salvaged structural steel. Phase 2 saw the complex enclosed with a standing seam roof and insulation, metal exterior walls and doors. The arena boards and glass, for which the National Hockey League Players Association assisted with the financing, have been installed.

According to **Pat Sutherland**, Pilot Mound Millennium Recreation Complex Chairman, the work crew is currently installing piping and strapping, soon to be followed by interior walls. He said, "There are 12 to 20 volunteers in there every day. The progress is amazing. We hired a professional bricklayer from another town to teach a team of volunteers his craft. He figured we would lay 200 bricks in a day. We laid 300."

Fundraising took on many forms from the very small to the very large. There were meat draws, toonie draws, donations from current and former residents, corporate donations, mega garage sales, farming rented land, growing produce for sale, raffles, lotteries, and a large bi-annual auction.

To borrow from the popular TV commercial, the benefits of the volunteer efforts

transcended fundraising and construction; it brought the community together and is, in fact, priceless! Young citizens have learned important lessons about selflessness and civic involvement. Former residents have rediscovered their roots and contributed time, sweat and money. Fundraising efforts have produced fringe benefits such as orchestral performances, dinner theatres, New Year's Eve celebrations, community dinners, hockey tournaments and curling bonspiels. Pilot Mound was even in the running for CBC-TV's *Hockeyville* crown last year. All these benefits and initiatives combine to bring the community together.

Update: A recent \$570,000 grant from the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Program and a \$25,000 donation from James Richardson International has meant the 'Miracle on Ice' has reached its \$3 M target. The town's youth hockey team, the Pilots, will be playing in the centre by December.

Portage la Prairie Multiplex

At the time of writing, a Recreation Committee made up of citizens has commissioned a feasibility study for a multiplex to serve the region in and around Portage la Prairie. Engineering consultant Stantec has released its report, and, according to **Dale Lyle**, CAO of the City of Portage la Prairie, the councils

for both the City and the RM of Portage la Prairie are currently studying the report.

Reeve **Toby Trimble** from the RM of Portage la Prairie told *The Leader*, "It's still in the initial discussion stage and we'll be meeting soon to see where we go from here. We've been talking with the City and doing our homework. We've also talked with other Manitoba municipalities that have gone through this process, in order to get their perspective. Even on a holiday in Victoria, I met a councillor there who sent me a BC study on recreation needs. The more information we have, the better decision we will be able to make."

City of Portage la Prairie Mayor **Ken Brennan** said, "By the time this issue of *The Leader* is out, we hope to be making a very exciting announcement. This issue has been around for 30 or 40 years and I feel it is time. It will be a project that will cost in the neighbourhood of \$25 to \$30 M (Editor's note: the Mayor stressed that this was a rough "guesstimate."), so we must perform our due diligence. Having said that, I feel a multiplex is something the community wants and, thus, the City has a strong interest in the project."

Update: On March 28, Councils from the City and RM of Portage la Prairie pledged their support for a new recreation facility at a press conference at Portage Centennial



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Arena. The City will contribute up to \$16M and the RM will contribute up to \$8M to replace Portage's aging arena. The Portage Recreation Committee will also seek corporate sponsors and private donations. The new facility will include an indoor swimming pool and two sheets of ice, along with other recreational facilities.

Parkland Recreation Complex (Dauphin)

The community of Dauphin undertook the development of Phase 1 of the Parkland Recreation Complex in 1995. Phase 1 included Manitoba's first indoor leisure pool, a six-sheet curling rink, banquet room, lounge and administrative offices for the Dauphin Joint Recreation Commission.

Phase II, completed in April 2006, was necessary for the future recreation needs of the community as the existing arena was at the end of its life cycle. Numerous deficiencies including outdated equipment, structural problems, inadequate seating and a variety of facility design issues deemed it unsuitable for renovation. The multi-event community arena facility built in its place – known as “Credit Union Place” - is attached to the existing recreation complex, with the entire complex now enjoying the positive economic returns that accompany the ability to host large events. (The Dauphin Recreation Commission describes the location as a “mini-industry” during each of the major events hosted, contributing direct economic benefit to local and area businesses.)

Energy-efficient technology used in the new arena is projected to reduce operating costs by up to \$75,000 annually and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The project was even a finalist in the AMM's 2007 Municipal Innovation Awards (see page 20 for a project summary). The City and RM are most proud however, of the way the community came together to see the project become reality. In their submission to the Municipal Innovation Award committee, Mayor **Alex Paul** and Reeve **Dennis Forbes** agreed, “It is extremely important for the entire community to work together towards a common goal. Despite the general consensus that councils are elected to make difficult decisions, in order to truly ensure a successful community project the general public needs to be consulted and feel part of the process.”

Manitobans are very fortunate to live in a province where quality of life is seen as a necessity and recreation is viewed as an important component of this necessity. As we see in this story, Manitobans also realize that many hands can get things done – and done properly. For this, we should all be thankful. ♻️

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