

Businesses jump to be attached to new four-pad arena

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Local businesses moved quickly to get their names attached to the Bob Gale Complex, the city's proposed four-pad arena, says the head of corporate fundraising campaign.

All four ice pads are named after local companies, said Mick Wolfe, the chairman of the committee trying to raise \$2.4 million by selling naming rights for the \$40-million city-owned facility.

Wolfe made that announcement at Monday's city council meeting, less than three months after Bob Gale, the owner of a chain of gas stations, donated \$1 million.

"We couldn't have imagined a more wonderful response," Wolfe said. "In a matter of weeks, we've nearly sold out the pieces."

Wolfe announced \$650,000 in new corporate donations that have been made since January.

The E.S. Fox company has agreed to donate \$250,000 to have the largest 2,000-seat arena carry its name.

Meridian Credit Union will chip in \$100,000 to have one of the community pads named after that financial institution.

"We like to give back to the communities we serve. This just fits the bill perfectly," said Tom Naylor, the manager of Meridian's branch on Portage Road at Morrison Street.

Meridian's donation exceeds the \$75,000 price tag the city had put on its community pads.

Lifetime Financial Group and Centennial Construction are each contributing \$75,000 to have the other two community pads named after their companies.

Two of the 20 dressing rooms will be named after lawyer and minor hockey supporter Brandon Boone and Upper Canada Consulting. Naming rights for the other 18 dressing rooms are still up for grabs at a cost of \$15,000 each, Wolfe said.

When the four-pad opens in 2009, Review sports reporters will cover Canucks games from the Pingue and Sons Construction press box as a result of Felix Pingue's \$20,000 contribution.

The convener's meeting room will be named after Sam Long whose family contributed \$30,000 for it to be named in honour of the long-time minor hockey convener.

Mayor Ted Salci commended the generosity of the companies. "We hope that they'll leave a great legacy."

Wolfe heads a group of 16 volunteers leading the fundraising campaign.

Their work has been going faster than they anticipated, Wolfe said. "You shouldn't be surprised given the way the community is willing to support its projects."

Salci credited the volunteers with acting quickly to raise the money. "You're doing a great job of putting yourself out of a job." Recreation commission chairman Don Jackson said the willingness for businesses to donate is a sign of how excited people in Niagara Falls are to see the new arena facility.

The Bob Gale Complex will replace the aging Niagara Falls Memorial, Stamford and Jack Bell arenas. A four-pad will add one more rink to city facilities, but the four-pad is expected to be cheaper to operate over the long term than to maintain the existing three arenas.

The Niagara Falls Memorial Community Room is the biggest-ticket item left. The city hopes to get \$100,000 for its naming rights.

In January, gas station owner Bob Gale got the ball rolling when he announced a \$1.25-million donation to the arena project. City council agreed to name the building after Gale, following his \$1-million donation. Gale also contributed \$250,000 as an annuity to be used to help local families pay registration fees for minor sports.

Wolfe called Gale's contribution "a great catalyst" to get other businesses interested in following suit.

The volunteers are also trying to get sponsorship for each of the 2,000 seats in the ES Fox arena. The target of the Great Seat Sale is to sell 100 seats a month over the next 20 months, Wolfe said.

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