

Work officially begins on new arena

Ground-breaking ceremony marks launch of Bob Gale Centre

Posted 6 days ago

With massive footprints of where new ice surfaces will soon sit in the background, city officials officially broke ground on the site of the new four-pad arena complex Thursday.

The site, which sits on a 16-acre plot of land donated by Cytec, has already been partially graded for the \$35-million facility, which will include four ice surfaces, community rooms and the Niagara Falls sports wall of fame.

The facility will be located on the old Cyanamid grounds at Stanley Avenue and Thorold Stone Road.

The spots where the ice surfaces themselves will sit have been sunk into the gravel base by about three feet, giving those looking on an early indication of where the complex will lie.

With the ground-breaking and planning work now complete, construction on the building will start immediately, said Niagara Falls director of parks, recreation and culture Denyse Morrissey.

"Now it's full-blown construction. The key is to get done as much as possible before the freezing starts," she said. "You can see where the rinks are going to be, so from this point onward, what you're going to see is the buildings start to rise around the outside of the perimeter.

"Underground, everything is in place to start building on top. When the building starts to go up it will take on some real magnitude," she said.

The ceremony also allowed the city to unveil the name of complex: The Gale Centre, named after Bob Gale, whose family donated \$1.25 million to the project's fundraising campaign.

Morrissey said the naming rights campaign is nearly complete with only the Niagara Falls Memorial Community Room at \$100,000 and 13 dressing rooms at \$15,000 each still available.

"The rest of the (naming rights) campaign is sold out. We've got about \$1.6 million to date of our total goal," she said.

Mick Wolfe, who is leading the fundraising team, said the corporate response has been overwhelming.

"Normally, the big properties go last, but this time they all went first. Now the community can see (construction) is officially started, so we can get on the seat sale campaign," he said.

The city is hoping to have the world's first arena where every seat is sponsored. So far, about 25 per cent of the 2,000 seats in the main rink have been sold. Seats range from \$200 to \$500 based on their location in the arena.

The four-pad will replace three of the four existing ice surfaces in Niagara Falls -the Memorial, Stamford and Jack Bell arenas.

Even though Chippawa-Willoughby Memorial Arena on Sodom Road will remain open, that facility's tenant, the Chippawa junior C Riverhawks, will move into the new building along with the Niagara Falls Canucks, Niagara Falls Minor Hockey, Stamford Skating Club and other local user groups.

Canucks head coach Terry Masterson said he's happy to see the construction get started.

"It's going to be nice. Everyone is anxiously awaiting. Everyone has worked hard on it, so everyone is ready to move forward into the 21st century," he said.

Construction on the building is expected to take about 18 months, with the opening slated for the spring of 2010.

For video of the groundbreaking ceremony, visit our website at www.nfreview.com.
