

Leisureplex History

In the spring of 1993 the Buffalo & Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority embarked upon a long-term visionary plan to position the Peace Bridge as the premier U.S. / Canada border crossing well into the next century. The development plan required the safe, efficient and cost effective accommodation of passenger and commercial vehicles due to the ever increasing international trade and traffic crossing the bridge, currently valued at more than \$22 billion annually. This plan and the need to accommodate the future twinning or widening of the Peace Bridge required an adequate land base. Given the proximity of the East End Arena to the bridgehead, the arena together with abutting road allowances were acquired by the Bridge Authority necessitating the process to locate and construct a new recreational facility for the residents of the Town.

In September of 1993 with the assistance of Mr. Paul Fell as facilitator, a Community Planning Workshop was conducted involving approximately 50 people from throughout Fort Erie. This Workshop discussed issues such as the establishment of a Citizen's Advisory Committee, developing criteria for site selection, single vs. double ice surface, amenities and revenue enhancement.

Emanating from the public workshop, the Municipal Council established a Citizen's Advisory Committee comprised of 14 residents and 1 Council member chaired by Mr. Keith Rothney. This Committee conducted a needs survey, addressed operational considerations, determined the overall scope of the facility and recommended a Fundraising Committee. This Committee submitted their report to Council in December of 1993 recommending that a twin-pad ice facility and banquet hall be constructed.

At the same time, Council accepted a generous land donation from the Edward J. Freeland Foundation and the Fort Erie Community YMCA. The 18 acres located in the geographic centre of Town would become the Town's new Municipal Centre comprised of the Leisureplex, Town Hall, YMCA, Central Park and possible future Cultural Centre.

In January of 1994, Council retained Jackson Ryder Architects Inc., also the designers for the Town Hall and numerous other arenas, to proceed with the architectural plans for the new Leisureplex. Simultaneously, the Leisureplex Fundraising Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. John Johnston, commenced a fundraising campaign with a target of \$2.2 million. Apart from this campaign, the Town's application for Jobs Ontario funding was approved in October of 1994 at \$1.8 million allowing the project to proceed to final design.

In an effort to fast track construction approval and to cap costs, the Municipal Council in November of 1994 awarded a guaranteed maximum price contract to Internorth Construction Company Limited. Construction commenced in April of 1995 and was completed in July of 1996.