



SUPPORT BEHIND THE SPORT WHEN THE FESTIVAL COMES TO TOWN

>> BY TAYLOR CRAIG

THE DURHAM REGION HOSTS THE 2014

Ontario Lacrosse Festival for the eleventh year this August, bringing together lacrosse fans and players in a central hub of the sport.

As competitors and hosts, all those involved in the Festival must prepare for the ten-day event and the estimated 55,000 attendees expected this year.

The most important facet of putting together an event such as the Ontario Lacrosse Festival is finding a location to host 10,865 participants over 1,255 total games. Due to the large nature of the event, games are divided between the Ajax Community Centre, McKinney Arena, Rickard Recreation Complex, Vipond Arena, Legends Centre, and Iroquois Park Sports Centre (IPSC).

“With a tournament the size of the Festival, support from the municipalities is important,” said Ron MacSpadyen, Program Director for the OLA. “Since the beginning in 2004, the staff at Iroquois Park Sports Centre have been welcoming and accommodating. As events become more complex and significantly more meaningful from an economic impact perspective, working with politicians and staff who understand our challenges is critical. We are very lucky to be working with some great people in Durham Region recreation.”

The IPSC acts as the central arena for the entirety of the Festival, hosting all three National championship games at the end of the ten-day run.

John Romano, Facility Supervisor at IPSC, says the sports centre is always faced with an unusual opportunity when the Festival comes to town.

"We have a unique facility in the area to be able to host an event of this size, because there aren't many facilities that can host it the way that we can," he said. "I'm really proud of the staff that we have here and their willingness on a day-to-day basis to go above and beyond to accommodate the needs of the Festival."

While most athletic tournaments run for just a weekend, the Ontario Lacrosse Festival inhabits the Town of Whitby for ten days. An event of this magnitude requires a specialized allocation and utilization of resources that only especially large sports centres, such as the IPSC, can accommodate.

The staff runs at capacity during the event, in addition to the volunteers that work through the OLA, working longer days to accommodate the packed schedule.

"Just in the maintenance section, we would have about 45 staff, and then there's another seven on the admin side," said Romano. "We have a very large staff anyway, and everybody looks forward to hosting the event."

Facilitators at the IPSC must always order more maintenance supplies in advance of the event, anticipating the need for enlarged quantities of necessities such as toilet paper and garbage bags. The concessions department also prepares for a larger crowd than they are normally accustomed to, usually selling original and new products in different accessible areas.

Maintenance to the arenas, such as painting and floor waxing, are planned every year to occur in the weeks leading up to the Festival so everything is brand new once play commences.

"We [Whitby] have a strong lacrosse history and we want to do a good job," said Romano. "Everybody realizes the importance of the event and makes sure to put their best foot forward to host to the best of our ability."

This immense effort is present in every aspect of the Festival, especially accommodations.

"There's a lot of pressure for all the hotels," said Kumar Singam, General Manager of LaQuanta Hotel in Oshawa. "There's not too much additional staff needed. Housekeeping becomes a pressure situation, but monetary wise, for income for the hotel, it drives a lot of revenue."

In 2009, hotels in the Durham region came together to create the Durham Hotel Associa-

tion in order to better discuss issues in the industry, as well as approaches to handling an event that brings so many people to their properties. According to Singam, all hotels work together as a group to help manage the influx of guests during the Festival instead of competing as single entities.

As the Festival has grown from hosting ten championships to 37, local hotels have had to adjust to accommodate an increasing number of visitors, often selling out of rooms over the ten day period almost a year in advance of the event.

"Thanks to the expertise of the Durham Hotel Association members, we are currently accommodating more teams in the Durham Region than ever," said MacSpadyen. "The DHA is an important part of our success and is



increasingly becoming a key player in promoting sports tourism business in Durham."

Because the size of the Festival has grown, it has had to spread throughout Whitby, Ajax, Oshawa, and Bowmanville. All municipalities have benefited from the economic impact.

In 2013, the Festival brought in a total \$5.7 million to the Durham Region, a \$4.1 million increase since its first run in 2004.

By sector, the Festival drives \$1.8 million accommodation spending, \$1.2 million in food & beverage services, \$1.1 million in retail shopping, \$0.7 million in transportation to and from the event, \$0.5 million in groceries, \$0.2 million in entertainment, and \$0.2 million in other factors. The 2014 edition of the Festival will generate about the same economic activity for the region.

"The Festival creates opportunities for visitors to our community to experience Whitby and the surrounding area, and it brings people in from out of province who might be visiting our area for the first time," said Peter LeBel,

Commissioner of Community and Marketing Services with the Town of Whitby. "There are also indirect economic impacts, such as the exposure we would get to our community and business people who can see the type of industry that we have here."

The Festival also creates a great opportunity for companies and retailers who wish to promote their products. The LaxShack was the first retailer to partner with the Festival, often bringing the majority of their store inventory to the IPSC site to promote their business.

Troyhann Santos, owner of the lacrosse retailer, has seen the Festival grow immensely throughout the years, picking up new sponsors and retailers who are able to showcase their products on the event floor.

"It's good, it gives us exposure to teams we normally wouldn't see throughout the season," said Santos. "It's a bigger event. There are more people. Sales always increase for the Festival."

Santos and her crew sell lacrosse equipment and merchandise, and also provide services on site, such as stringing lacrosse sticks. She looks forward to this event annually, as it brings in significant income for her company and it is "a great atmosphere where people want to be involved."

According to MacSpadyen, the co-operation and efforts of the entire town and its surrounding municipalities is one of the reasons the Festival continues to be successful.

"I would encourage and highly recommend other sports events to consider the Durham Region as an ideal event site," said MacSpadyen. "The Festival has marched along thanks to great municipal support, which we continue to enjoy and appreciate." **OLM**