

Aurora Family Leisure Complex gives community a sneak peek of renovations



By Brock Weir

There might still be a long way to go before it is done, and newer additions might still be waiting for a proper roof, but that wasn't going to let the Town of Aurora from showing off the newly renovated and expanded Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) this week.

The Department of Parks and Recreation Services threw open the doors to the Industrial Parkway North facility on Monday afternoon to give members of the public a sneak peek of what is in store.

While there is much work to be done in the south end of the facility, Aurora's youth were already busy breaking in 'The Loft', the newly-chosen name for the Community Space for Youth. It's a blast of colour in an otherwise stark building, complete with table games like ping pong, a big screen TV, couches, and an expansive mural, which was created by local youth as part of Aurora's Canada Day Celebrations.

'14 years ago we hired a youth coordinator and the Council of the day recognized the importance of youth to our community,' said Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. 'In 2005, we were identified as a youth friendly community without any youth centre. We had a number of programs operating out of 19 different facilities within the community at one point.'

By 2012, Aurora had approved a Youth Needs Analysis recognizing the need for a youth space, eventually moving forward with an award of tender for construction in November, 2013.

'We couldn't have one this without youth engagement,' said Mr. Downey. 'Youth were very critical in moving this project forward. We heard from so many and heard so many different ideas. It was actually a great experience for us to get engaged with the youth and our independent consultant did that as well with a number of surveys and meetings with youth to hear their ideas and, of course, staff expertise.'

The ceremonial ribbon was cut by a group of these youth, who were joined by Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, as well as Councillors John Abel, Evelyn Buck, Don Constable, Sandra Humfries, Paul Pirri and Michael Thompson.

The Loft includes a drop in centre for youth, spaces with air hockey, Wii, foosball, board games, and other entertainment. There will also be learn-to-cook programs, and a multipurpose gym which will be available for all ages. Additional programs include recreational volleyball, a climbing wall, and a skateboard park at the south end of the building, which is largely complete now.

?This is a \$6 million transformation of this particular facility,? concluded Mr. Downey. ?We have a \$7.4 million budget, including contingency. I am happy to say we are still on budget. We're a little off schedule, but we're still on budget.?

The ribbon cutting had an extra layer of poignancy with family members of the late Judy Sherin on hand to look at the ice arena, which will be named in her honour. Ms. Sherin, an employee of the Parks and Recreation Department for nearly 25 years, got her start working the reception desk at the AFLC. Her husband, Terry, was joined at the ceremony, by their children, grandchildren, and new granddaughter Hope, the most recent addition to their family who arrived earlier this month.

?It is a great honour this arena is going to be named after Judy,? said Mr. Sherin. ?It's a great honour and the kids are very pleased about this. Judy enjoyed working for the Town for year and was even contemplating working another two years after her 65th birthday, and I am sorry to say that didn't happen. I appreciate everything that has been done.?

Added Mr. Downey: ?Many people only knew the department through Judy, so we are very thrilled to be able to put Judy's name on it. It is a fitting place to honour Judy's contribution.?