

Parents step up with \$5 million gift to make new SAC arena a reality



By Angela Gismondi

St. Andrew's College (SAC) celebrated the opening of its new arena at the school's annual homecoming festivities Saturday.

The La Brier Family Arena, a 50,000-square-foot facility which took 18 months to complete, officially opened its doors to the school community and the public. Located on the SAC campus in Aurora, it includes an NHL-sized ice surface, seating capacity for 800-plus spectators, five change rooms and a concession stand. The \$13-million multiuse facility is more than just an arena, housing a club room and catering kitchen, indoor dry land training area, an athletic therapy treatment centre and a 6,000-square-foot, two-storey weight training space.

To mark the grand opening of the complex Saturday, guests were invited to lace up their skates and try out the new ice surface and three alumni hockey games followed by a social in the evening. A ribbon-cutting ceremony and special presentation was also held and was attended by donors, and those who helped build the arena such as Bolt Development, Graziani & Corazza Architects, project managers Turner & Townsend, and local dignitaries including Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe.

SAC, an independent, all-boys university preparatory school founded in 1899, has been fundraising for additional facilities since 2011, including a \$22.5-million academic facility (to open in 2015) and a \$6.5-million state-of-the-art outdoor athletic complex that opened in 2012.

An arena was added to the mix when current parents Michael and Wendy La Brier stepped up with a \$5-million gift earmarked for an arena.

"This wasn't on our radar for this campaign, but we weren't about to turn down this generous leadership gift and the opportunity to fulfill our dream of having an on-campus arena," said SAC Headmaster Kevin McHenry. "It is a surreal experience for me to be standing at centre ice. I cannot tell you how proud I am to lead this school and to have such an incredible school community. This is a tremendous asset for our school. It's a milestone for our school."

The La Briers said the arena will "add richness to life at the school."

"It did not take Wendy and I long to gain an appreciation for what the school has done for our boys Jacob and Lucas, and we decided to do something as a family that would add to its legacy," said Michael, adding it was important to make a donation to

improve the infrastructure at the school. ?This is an arena that will stand the test of time.?

Mike Sifton, chairman of the SAC board of directors, thanked the generous donors for their support.

?This would not have happened if it wasn't for our generous donors and extraordinary generosity of folks over the generations, generations of ?Andreans,?' said Sifton. ?All this went from an idea to what you see right here in the span of two years.?

The facility complements the school's athletic program at SAC and provides additional ice surface for user groups in the Town of Aurora. Any ice not being used by St. Andrew's will be available for rent. The York Simcoe Express have signed a contract making the La Brier Family Arena their home ice for their nine teams' games and practices.

The aesthetics of the arena reflect the SAC character, thanks to the talent and vision of two art teachers at the school ? Tino Paolini and Stephen Kimmerer. Paolini painted four large oil portraits of SAC athletes past and present, three of which are displayed in the Iwai Family Lobby, and the other on the second floor above the staircase to the Lawrence Family Lobby and the Yuill Andrean Room. Kimmerer created 27 separate panels and vinyl graphics that surround the ice surface walls.

The graphics showcase a range of SAC sports using a mix of historic and modern images.

With files from SAC.