

Timberlane set to close next August as tennis hits ?all-time high?

By Brock Weir

As Timberlane Athletic Club gets set to make way for housing next year, it will be like losing a home away from home for members who have been there since day one, according to Timberlane's John Ramsbottom.

Although the exact timing of when the popular athletic club will be closed for good has yet to be confirmed, members have at least one more year before they have to start worrying.

Brookfield Homes, the new owners of the site, are currently leasing the Vandorf Road facilities back to current operators of the club, but this lease lasts through to the end of August 2015, says Mr. Ramsbottom.

?What they have agreed to is give us six months' notice as to whether we will be continuing on the lease after that,? Mr. Ramsbottom explains. ?For us, as a business, the best times for us to finish off something will be at the end of April because we get in a full indoor tennis season, or at the end of August because we get a full summer of summer camps. They have agreed in principle to that.

?In the meantime, and throughout, it is business as usual.?

When news of the sale of Timberlane began to circulate last year, so too did rumours about what was going to happen to the club and reasons for the sale, he says. These rumours, he added, hit fever pitch this summer.

?There were rumours we were going to be closed this September, even though we announced to our members we were going to be in business until the end of January 2015 because that is when the final sale is going through,? he says. ?There was another rumour that the club was going bankrupt and it is going to close because of that, but it was mostly about when the closing date was going to be.?

Despite their fears, however, the rumours did not hurt summer business. For a club that opens up its doors to the kids for a series of camps throughout the summer months, these camps are flourishing more this year than in any other, he says.

Over the years they have broadened the scope of their clubs from simply tennis and swimming, to a variety of other programs including a ?glee? camp.

Part of the upswing can be attributed to the closure and demolition of Newmarket's Glenway Golf and Country Club two years ago and the fact that Timberlane is, to be blunt, quite simply the only game in Town at the moment as far as indoor tennis is concerned.

Although this has caused a bit of a surge in terms of numbers, it has also created its own problems now that timeframes become clearer as to when the club will be consigned to the history books.

?For a lot of members of Timberlane, it is their second home,? says Mr. Ramsbottom. ?There were a lot of people who were freaking out, especially the tennis players because without Glenway there really is no other place to play indoor tennis right now. For a lot of our tennis members, they have been here almost since Day 1.

?One of the things I love about the club business is Timberlane becomes a community unto itself. It is a place where people meet their life partners, it is a place where people bring their kids, their kids grow up, and we see the kids go from young kids, to teens, to adult members. There has been that continuation. For many staff who have been here almost since the opening, this has been their life as well and they have had their kids grow up and move on. When I say it is a second home, it really is.?

But, for the time being, Timberlane remains open to people who want to join them in their humble abode. Membership rules for however long is left on their clock have been relaxed, as have fees.

Year-long commitments are gone in favour of month to month memberships, a significant reduction in monthly tennis memberships,

plus the addition of court fees, and fitness memberships remain open.

As Timberlane prepares for what appears to be its final year in operations, Mr. Ramsbottom is reflective about the future of indoor tennis in Aurora. No firm decision has been made yet as far as an indoor tennis facility at Stewart Burnett Park and with remaining land at a premium in Town, he says he sees few options going forward.

‘There is going to be a void when it comes to tennis and it is a real shame,’ he says. ‘Tennis is so huge in Canada right now with Milos Raonic and Genie Bouchard and it is at an all-time high. They set records in both Montreal and Toronto with attendance and our junior tennis programs are busting at the seams, partly as a result of that and I think that is another thing that is going to be very much effected by Timberlane.

‘I have a phenomenal staff and it will be very difficult when that finally ends because we're a pretty tight group. It is going to be sad and frustrating.’