

Hendervale owner disputes Olympic committee refusal

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

Stinging from being passed over by Toronto's Olympic Bid Committee, the owner of Hendervale Equestrian Complex is still searching for answers three months after receiving the bad news.

Janet Manbert first heard they were snubbed back in May while attending a show at the North Caledon Equestrian Centre (NCEC) in Palgrave, Ont. She wasn't informed by letter or e-mail, but by a public announcement on the loud speaker that NCEC was named to potentially host 2008 Olympic equestrian events.

"That was not well-received. Everyone asked why," said Ms Manbert. "I would have chosen York well ahead of them. If they had, I wouldn't have said a word."

To back up her contention that Hendervale is far more suitable than NCEC, Ms Manbert prepared an exhaustive comparison of the two sites which she included in a letter to Ontario Premier Mike Harris. This list, she said, shows that everything including public access and proximity to Toronto is in Hendervale's favour.

Especially important, said Ms Manbert, is the legacy of whichever site hosts the equestrian events. Hendervale, she said, would have continued to be a major attraction while NCEC will not.

"When this is all over with, no one will go near Palgrave," said Ms Manbert.

"It will cost three or four times the amount to build the equestrian facility in Palgrave as it would here at Hendervale."

JANET MANBERT

Since 1996 the \$7.5 million Hendervale site has hosted major international equestrian events, some of the largest staged in the Ontario in fact. In 1996, three members of the Toronto Bid Committee came to the site — located at the crossroads of Oakville, Milton and Burlington — and looked over the property.

"They said it would be absolutely fabulous for the 2008 equestrian events," said Ms Manbert, who explained that five or six other venues planned to bid.

Countless volunteer hours and \$25,000 later, Ms Manbert also submitted a proposal. Then in May came the bad news.

"Palgrave has nothing to offer, but property as the venue and nothing to offer for the infrastructure," said Ms Manbert. "It will cost three or four times the amount to build the equestrian facility in Palgrave as it would here at Hendervale."

If Toronto wants to host a profitable games, Ms Manbert continued, more emphasis should be placed on facilitating spectator participation and holding down costs.

Ms Manbert fired off her letter to

the bid committee and six weeks later she received a reply which she characterized as "generic." In the reply, sports and venues vice-president and chair Doug Hamilton said Palgrave is the "best venue" for the games and that "only a portion" of Hendervale is suitable. The professionals hired by Ms Manbert to assess her site arrived at the opposite conclusion, she said.

While examining the criteria for the games, Ms Manbert said she believed that her site already possessed 75 per cent of the physical grounds and buildings and 90 per cent of the necessary infrastructure for everything but the cross-country events. She was also willing to spend the dollars to bring it up to the necessary standards.

"Really, it's not a great deal of work to get it ready," said Ms Manbert.

For example, 400 stalls are needed. Hendervale already has 350 with plans to add many more before 2008.

Ms Manbert said Hendervale is 25 minutes from Toronto on major highways instead of an hour through heavy traffic on a two-lane road like Palgrave. Public transportation to Hendervale includes VIA Rail and GO, while there's no mass transit to the NCEC.

Locally, there's a hospital five minutes away. In Palgrave, a hospital is 35 minutes away. Hendervale has 35-minute access to Guelph Agricultural College — the best veterinarian facility in eastern Canada — while the nearest such facility to NCEC is 90 minutes away. "I just feel we didn't get a fair shake," said Ms Manbert.

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