

Milton Sports Centre opens Thursday

Phase one includes twin rinks and gymnastics club

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

Game on!

Starting Thursday, Milton hockey players will utter those words in a brand new venue, as the much-anticipated twin rinks open for competition.

The 250-seat pads — with additional viewing available in slightly-elevated lobby stands — are part of a \$13-million initial phase of the multi-faceted Milton Sports Centre.

The Derry Road complex also includes a 15,000-square-foot home for the until now under-accommodated Milton Gymnastics Club, that'll assume occupancy in about a month. "It's enormous. It's so big and accommodating," said longtime head coach Janet Campbell, who's already had a couple of sneak peaks at the new facility. "We're delighted with what we're getting. This is a permanent home."

Housing the first ice pads built locally in a quarter of a century, the Milton Sports Centre has several unique features — the most visible of which is eight-foot high letter signage situated at the north-east corner of the building.

"There's lights at the bottom to illuminate it (sign) at night," explained Milton's Community Services Director Jennifer Reynolds, during a comprehensive tour of the facility Friday morning. "Once all the landscape work is done behind, it's going to look great."

On a more practical note, the complex will house its share of visitor-friendly gizmos — including an electronic pole on Santa Maria Boulevard that'll highlight upcoming events and direction-oriented television screens in the main entrance.

These aids will be added later this fall, while a massive oval-shaped concession stand should be in operation by the end of January. An interim refreshment set-up — at least during busy periods — will be available in the meantime.

Reynolds expects the 60-seat raised viewing area outside each rink to be especially well-received by fans and parents, adding that various team rooms offer even more room to take in the action.

Each pad has six dressing rooms and ample storage space, while a 180-seat banquet hall looks out onto what will be one of the two future rinks that are expected to be built by 2009.

The Town has committed to revisiting hockey and skating club needs before beginning construction of phase two — which could still include an Olympic-size centerpiece ice surface.

Other phase one features include a state-of-the-art computerized refrigeration plant and indoor snow removal capacity, something currently unavailable at either Memorial Arena or John Tonelli Sports Centre.

"It's a fabulous facility," said Reynolds, who noted that phase one was completed within a year despite last month's blackout and the extra pumping required from a particularly wet spring.

Sharing a similar view of the complex are two long-time sports enthusiasts who'll be spending their fair share of time in it.

"It's state-of-the-art. I'm quite impressed," said rep hockey manager and Scooter's Snack Shack proprietor Scott Anders, who's among those bidding on the concession stand contract.

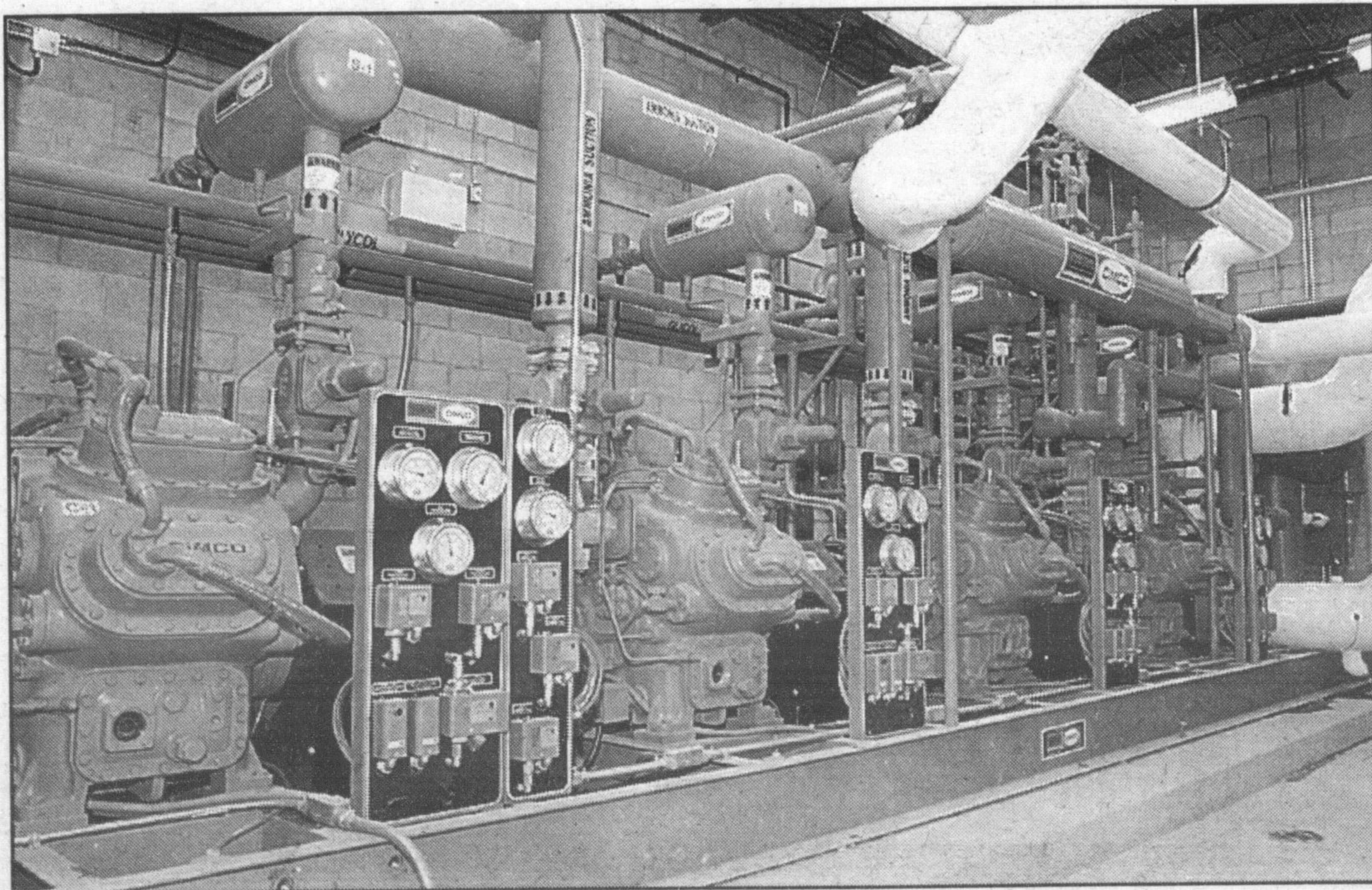
Added longtime Milton Skating Club president Charlotte Koso, "It's just beautiful. I'm going to be proud to be there when we hold testing and competitions."

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Milton's newest ice-man, Gary Heinz (above and centre), takes an inaugural spin around one of the ice surfaces at the new Milton Sports Centre, which features unique signage (at top) and a state-of-the-art computerized refrigeration plant. Phase one of the complex opens Thursday.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



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