

Legacy of Games to live on in Pan Am building

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Markham's role in the 2015 Pan Am-Parapan Am Games will create a lasting sports legacy for current and future York Region generations, Pan Am CEO Saad Rafi said.

"Storybook," is how Rafi described Markham's connection with the community and the Games themselves.

As one of several official GTA host cities for the world's third largest international multi-sport competition, Markham will be the venue for badminton, water polo, golf, table tennis and para table tennis next summer. While golf debuts for the first time in the history of the Games at Angus Glen Golf and Country Club, the centrepiece for the indoor sports is the Atos Markham Pan Am Centre.

The state-of-the-art \$78.5-million, 13,650 sq. metre (147,000 sq. ft.) facility, lauded for its spectacular form and function, publicly launches Nov. 23 and you're invited to experience what Rafi enthusiastically praised as an international showcase "built by the community, in the community for the community".

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The 2 to 6 p.m. grand opening will be a family friendly extravaganza, Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti said.

"It'll be the biggest pool party in the history of Markham," he said. "We want everyone to jump in and be a part of history."

Already a dual design and architectural award winner, the multipurpose centre is marvel of ingenuity. Clad in bird-friendly glass with pleasing swaths of colour, the centre houses a triple gymnasium with approximately 3,158 sq. metres (34,000 sq. feet) for training, competition and community use as well as a 10-lane, 50-metre, four million litre Olympic-sized swimming pool that boasts two moveable bulkheads and a transferable floor that can be raised and lowered.

The centre's 12.5-metre-high field house ceilings meet exacting international badminton, volleyball and other sport height requirements, Rafi said. Innovations in the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) facility include variable air ducts that ensure badminton shuttlecocks are not affected while in flight.

In addition to the athletic facilities, the centre has several all-purpose rooms, meeting areas and a two-level fitness centre at the 2.4-hectare property at 16 Main St., Unionville.

Responsible for the largest international sports games in Canada's history, a \$1.4 billion budget, 32 competitive venues, 20,000 volunteers, 250,000 visitors and 10,000 athletes, trainers and coaches from across Latin, South and North America and the Caribbean in 36 Pan Am sports and 15 Parapan Am sports, there "are a lot of moving parts," Rafi understated.

Since TO2015 was awarded the Games

in 2009, Markham was a frontrunner venue choice and "an enthusiastic and supportive partner," Rafi said.

"It's been like that since the beginning," he said. "Kudos to Mayor Scarpitti, the council and the volunteers."

Markham's marshalling of some 170 daily workers over 24 months of facility construction and a strategic long-range vision has created a gift, a "sport legacy," for generations, suggested Rafi.

The centre, partially named after sponsor Atos until the Games are completed, will be a key plank in Markham's mixed-use downtown core master plan, Rafi said. York University's proposed adjacent satellite campus will be a complimentary venue. Along with Unionville's neighbouring athletics-based Bill Crothers Secondary School, the community will become "a fantastic hub for recreational through high-performance sports activities," Rafi enthused.

Further, Canadian sports tourism is valued at \$5.3 billion annually, Rafi said. With the quality infusion afforded by the new centre, Ontario and York Region has a chance for "a piece of that pie," he added.

"Absolutely," said Scarpitti, admitting the facility is one of his proudest achievements. "It's an achievement that belongs to everybody, a great example of how three levels of government worked together."

He views the centre as a major building block, the "cornerstone for a vibrant, livable downtown core".

The Nov. 23 open house will feature an assemblage of dignitaries from all levels of government and a blessing ceremony by First Nations. Mayor Scarpitti will emcee the affair that includes Pan Am athletes, a procession of flags of the 41 participating countries, live bands, sport demonstrations, interactive try-it zones, facility tours and refreshments.

The first 1,000 arrivals will each receive a free Pachi souvenir. The porcupine mascot further reinforces Markham's connection to the Games that will attract an estimated 250,000 visitors and more than 300 million viewers, Scarpitti said.

A group of four Buttonville Public School Grade 8 students entered the Toronto2015 mascot creation challenge as part of a school project. Their novel mascot, with 41 different coloured quills representing each competing nation, won.

Scarpitti encourages everyone to join the celebration.

"The sheer capacity of what the centre can do and what it means to future generations is amazing," he said. "There's a legacy here that will nurture athletes from around the GTA and will attract international competitions. Capacity has really been added to the community for people of all ages and abilities."

Asked if he will bring his bathing suit to the grand opening, the mayor guffawed.

"The joke around the office is that I should stand in the pool as the floor is raised," he said. "It'd be the first time in my political history that I'd be walking on water."

For details, including how you can be a torchbearer for the Games, visit markham.ca or toronto2015.org



Ten-lane, 50-metre, four million litre Olympic-sized swimming pool is ready for swimmers. York Region residents are invited to test the waters at a pool party Nov. 23

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