

## **Four Municipalities, Four Approaches to Sport Development**

*by Sheila Robertson*

### **Pointe-Claire Boasts Tradition and Vision**

The City of Pointe-Claire, located on the Island of Montreal, is well-known for the quality and scope of its sport programs. Unlike other municipalities, it does not have a formal sport policy. What happens there is largely the result of tradition that is engrained in the culture of city management. And although many sports are offered year-round, it is fair to say that the city's aquatic centre is the hub of the action with thriving swimming, diving, and canoe/kayak programs, for all ages and abilities, on offer. Also onsite is the Bob-Birnie Arena, extensively renovated in 2006, and the Pointe-Claire Public Library.

The Pointe-Claire story is very much about a handful of key individuals.

It helps to hire a visionary and that's what the Pointe-Claire City Council did when the aquatic centre opened its doors in 1966. The facility housed Canada's first 50-metre indoor pool and the council expected it to become a hotbed of competitive swimming through the soon-to-be launched Pointe-Claire Swim Club. As well, there were high expectations for the other aquatic sports of diving, water polo, and synchronized swimming.

In their wisdom, the council understood that the success they wanted would require hiring someone with strong coaching and administrative expertise, a rare combination in those days, as well as leadership strengths and political know-how. Luckily, just down the road was the ideal candidate.

George Gate had landed in the small, isolated lumber town of Ocean Falls, B.C., from his native England in 1950. Initially hired as pool manager, he also took on coaching duties and, in the next 14 years, built a swimming powerhouse that produced half of Canada's Olympic swim team in 1964 and won 26 national events. A pioneer of innovative coaching methods, he was on seven occasions the head coach of Canada's national teams.

In 1964, Gate moved to the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, again combining head coach and aquatic director duties.

Although Pointe-Claire at that time was populated by only 18,000 people, it boasted a strong aquatic system, with seven 25-metre outdoor pools built by volunteer associations from the late 1940s through to the early 1960s, each located in a city park. The thinking was that these very popular pools would provide the talent pool the new facility needed.

Driving the process were several city councillors with aquatic backgrounds. Malcolm Knox, for whom the facility is now named, was a water polo player of note. Another water polo player, George Buckingham, was the chair of the city's Aquatic Advisory Board, struck when the outdoor pools were in the works. "That board was made up of Pointe-Claire businessmen who had a strong interest in aquatics and the political power to make things happen, things like the aquatic centre and the hiring of George," says Gary Malcolm, who started working at the pool as a lifeguard in 1967.

With Gate in charge, progress was fast and furious.

First on the chopping block were parent-run clubs. After analyzing the situation, Gate concluded that optimal results required him, not the parents, to be in control. When the swim club president balked and tried to get him fired, Gate went directly to council with his demands, got their blessing, dissolved the club, and started fresh. "The parents became a support group similar to the outdoor pools' advisory board and no longer made the major

decisions. George did,” says Malcolm, who found himself in the thick of the action after Gate promoted him to program coordinator in 1970.

Next came a new initiative to largely replace the Red Cross Learn to Swim program. Gate was unhappy that his mainly Anglophone swimmers were failing the Red Cross levels because they were offered only in French. Again, he sought and got council support for what was a revolutionary initiative. No one, it was assumed, could challenge a Red Cross program and win. Retaining the Red Cross programs for instructor training and life saving, Gate designed what he called Olympic Way learn-to-swim programs for youngsters wishing to be competitive swimmers. “Nobody batted an eye because the quality of instruction he devised was excellent,” says Malcolm.

In short order, the facility was booming and by the early 1970s, Gate decided, again with council approval, to replace himself as coach with three young co-coaches — Dave Johnson, Tom Johnson, and Don Packer. In so doing, he devised an employment package that was, and remains, unique among Canadian municipalities. Each coach became a City of Pointe-Claire employee with appropriate salaries, benefits, and pensions. It is interesting to note that no formal, written policy guided this; instead, it became and remains an accepted practice.

Malcolm stresses the importance of Gate having strong political support throughout his tenure. “Malcolm Knox continued to be very influential, even more so after he became a councillor and eventually mayor of Pointe-Claire.”

In 1974, Gate turned his attention to the diving club, another parent-run organization that wasn’t producing what he thought it could and should. He convinced council to allow him to lure Don Webb, arguably the best diving coach in Canada, to Pointe-Claire. For his part, Webb was attracted by the fact that the aquatic centre housed the country’s only 10-metre indoor tower. He, too, became a salaried city employee and built just what Gate wanted – the country’s leading diving club.

Lack of space, due to the popularity of the swimming and diving programs, made it difficult to offer top-end water polo and synchronized swimming programs. Still, the city paid for part-time coaches — Gino Ats and Lenora Tamney respectively — and four Pointe-Claire water polo players competed at the 1972 Olympic Games. Eventually the two programs were dropped.

Gate’s success – skill, drive, and persuasiveness aside – derives from his place on the city’s organizational chart. As aquatic director, he was equal to the recreation director and answered directly to the city manager and to council. He also established the operating budgets, capital expenditures, and ten-year plans. “This was a unique situation and a key component because in those days, recreation directors across Canada tended to be afraid of aquatics,” says Malcolm. “They didn’t understand how to run the programs and they were afraid of high performance. They still are, especially in aquatics. (Funny they don’t seem to be afraid of it in hockey.) Most important, George had the vision, and his vision didn’t have to be diluted.”

Malcolm knows whereof he speaks. Along with all his other skills, Gate was an exemplary mentor with Malcolm the beneficiary. “In 1974, I became George’s assistant director and for the next 20 years, until he retired in 1994, I evolved along with him. There isn’t a better mentor. And when he retired, it was a given that I would run this facility, and I have done so.”

There was, however, a major blip along the way. Malcolm, whose formal title today is director of sports, leisure, culture, and social development, endured four miserable years, from 2002 to 2006, when the 27 independent municipalities on the island of Montreal were merged with the City of Montreal and became boroughs. These entities were responsible for local administration with the city handling “important” matters such as economic development.

Malcolm’s position as aquatic director was a casualty of the merger when the new city replaced all such positions with overall directors, often parachuting people from outside the boroughs. Pointe-Claire politicians dug in their heels and insisted that Malcolm get the job. “When the city agreed to hire me, it was quite an exception. But I had

lived in Pointe-Claire most of my life, was very familiar with the administrators and volunteers associations, and had the expertise. And they wanted aquatics to remain in the forefront.”

So Malcolm became the director but it was hardly a pleasant experience. “I was all over the place and so diluted that it was hard to make any sense of it.” One victory was retaining the full-time paid coaches. “I fought to keep all the coaching staff under my direction,” says Malcolm. “It was a battle but we succeeded.”

The mergers proved unpopular, to say the least, and in 2004, referendums resulted in 15 of the municipalities, including Pointe-Claire, regaining their independence. The formal de-merger took place on January 1, 2006, and Malcolm assumed his present position. “De-merging was a great relief,” he says.

### **Changing Times**

Today, three sports call the Malcolm-Knox facility home. Head coach of the swim club from 2005 to 2009, Peter Carpenter spent 27 years at the pool as a swimmer and coach and was recently appointed head coach and aquatics manager at McGill University. Like Carpenter did, Pointe-Claire’s interim head coach, Ryan Mallette, works with one assistant, five age group coaches, and seven 10-and-under coaches. The membership averages out to 350 swimmers. The budget for their salaries is \$325,000 annually and all but the 10-and-under coaches are full time. Yihua Li coaches the diving club, which has a membership of 90 to 100 divers, one assistant coach – four-time Olympic diver David Bedard – and two age group coaches. The coach salaries amount to \$100,000. Julie Corbeil is the head coach of the canoe club, whose membership nears 1,000. The city pays the salaries of Corbeil, part-time assistant head coach Marc Creamer, and 11 age group coaches to the tune of \$200,000; these coaches answer to recreation manager Pat Strati. As was the case when the Johnsons and Packer were hired, the full-time coaches continue to receive the same benefits as other city employees while the part-timers get some benefits and, if they work over 700 hours annually, can join the pension plan.

Following the example of his mentor and with an eye on the future, after the de-merger Malcolm appointed a division manager for aquatics. The person he chose was then-Pointe-Claire Swim Club head coach Bill Gate, son of George. Mallette and Li and their coaches both report to Gate.

There is plenty of give and take between the three clubs. For example, Corbeil’s paddlers use the pool for winter training, all three use the weight room, and Li shares her expertise in core strength. Malcolm ensures that several times a year all the coaches meet with Gate, Strati, and himself for in-depth discussions and knowledge exchange.

The three clubs proudly point to national and international success. Between them, they claim multiple former world record holders and 30 Olympians, including 2008 tower silver medallist Émilie Heymans who is coached by Li and paddler Thomas Hall who, coached by Creamer, won the C-1 1000-metres bronze medal in Beijing. Two other 2008 Olympians – kayaker Andrew Willows and backstroker Tobias Oriwol – train out of Pointe-Claire.

Of course, sport in Pointe-Claire is about more than aquatics. Soccer and ice hockey, for example, receive annual grants from Malcolm and these offset the costs of hiring a part-time professional coach, Jason Broadhurst in soccer and Jim Webster in hockey. Each coach receives an honorarium to train the volunteer coaches and deliver coaching clinics. Both report to the presidents of their respective associations, but, says Malcolm, his door is always open should the need arise. “I have a professional rapport with these coaches and expertise that some of the association presidents wouldn’t have. Presidents come and go, but I, the directors, and the coaches are a constant.”

Whatever the sport, all of the coaches are required to attain National Coaching Certification Program qualifications, with the level dependent upon their coaching responsibilities.

Malcolm suggests that Pointe-Claire’s model could be considered by municipalities wishing to develop a strong sport presence throughout their communities. One of its undeniable benefits is the continuity of its personnel. “Many parent-run clubs have a coach for a certain number of years, a conflict arises over results or methods or

whatever, and they let him go, despite his knowledge and expertise. Canada has lost some fairly successful coaches because of this. And then there's the issue of salaries and benefits. I push to keep these in line with the education sector. For communities to develop strong programs, they've got to make it attractive for young coaches to stay in the system."

Support from local politicians remains essential. These days, former national team swimmer Rob Geller is the local councillor Malcolm turns to for support. The brother of Mitch Geller, Diving Canada's chief technical officer, he has been critical in shaping the future of sport in Pointe- Claire. Begun on April 14, 2009, is a massive \$15.7 million project to build a world-class, 10-lane, 50-metre pool with funds provided jointly by the city and the provincial government. "You must have a councillor who will speak on behalf of sport. As a community, it is absolutely vital to have that political will; otherwise, it is really hard to move forward." Another key player is MNA Geoff Kelley, who lobbied long and hard for the project.

With an average of 500,000 swimmers per year having come through Malcolm-Knox since 1967, the facility was stretched far beyond capacity. Also outdated, with corroding pipes and other major deficiencies, it is slated for reconstruction. The new facility will extend diagonally from the existing facility and will permit water polo and synchronized swimming programs to be developed. It is, as Malcolm says, a dream come true for him and his mentor.

## Calgary's Sport Policy Breaks New Ground

Over 320,000 Calgarians are estimated to be actively engaged in 85 sport activities that are administered by over 400 sport organizations.

Despite this flourishing environment, an illustrious sporting history, and its well-deserved reputation as a sport mecca, for many years Calgary lacked a formal sport policy. In 2002, the Calgary Sport Council, a volunteer, non-profit society established to represent sport to the municipal council, became the driving force behind several initiatives – the Calgary Civic Sport Policy, unveiled in 2005 and the first of its kind in Canada; a Strategic Plan adopted in 2006 to drive the policy; and, in 2008, *Team Spirit: Advancing Amateur Sport for All Calgarians*, a 10-year strategic plan covering sport facility development and enhancement.

### Calgary Sport Council

The seven partners that formed the Calgary Sport Council were the Canadian Sport Centre Calgary, the Calgary Olympic Development Association (now WinSport Canada), the Calgary High Schools Athletic Association, the Calgary Booster Club, the Federation of Calgary Communities, the City of Calgary, and Talisman Centre, a facility built for the 1987 Western Canada Summer Games that has a dual sport and recreation mandate.

The Council strives to assist, support, and influence the growth of sport in Calgary by

- advocating the values and benefits of sport.
- increasing sports' profile.
- facilitating education and training opportunities for athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, parents, and volunteers.
- acting as a resource for amateur sport organizations.
- encouraging and facilitating sport tourism.
- working towards the development of a vision and strategy to deal with the growth of sport.
- playing a lead role in implementing the sport policy.

As Tim Bjornson, the council's executive director explains, prior to 2002, there were no city policies directly related to sport. "In fact," he says, "sport organizations and clubs were each delivering sport on an individual basis. A civic sport policy that encompassed the entire sport delivery system was essential; the time for dealing with sport issues in a one-off fashion was long past, not least because of the city's rapid growth rate."

In the fall of 2003, a direct appeal to Mayor Dave Bronconnier noted "the growing awareness in the sport community that Calgary is falling behind other jurisdictions in our ability to provide choice in our facilities and quality in our programming." Bronconnier, living up to his reputation as "one of the most innovative and outspoken municipal leaders in Canada", responded quickly and positively. Within two weeks, a steering committee began to formulate the sport policy.

Eight key areas of emphasis for advancing sport objectives were addressed in the sport policy's strategic plan: leadership, accessibility, infrastructure, event bidding and hosting, stakeholder roles, promotion and branding, recognition of athletes, coaches, and volunteers, and grants and funding. The task of implementing the policy was assigned to three partners – the City of Calgary, the Calgary Sport Council, and the Calgary Sport Tourism Authority.

The need for an independent body to represent sport was recognized, with that role assigned to the sport council. Of particular interest was the decision to assign bidding and hosting to the tourism authority. "That was an important piece because a lot of the work being done on the sport tourism side was *ad hoc*," says Bjornson. "We found that organizations were running events simultaneously and were competing for the same facilities. We needed to make sure we worked together to a common goal to improve sport in Calgary as a whole."

The sport policy merits close examination not only for its scope, but also because of its close alignment to the federal government's *Canadian Sport Policy* ([www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/sc/pol/pcs-csp/index-eng.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/sc/pol/pcs-csp/index-eng.cfm)) that aims "to have, by 2012, a dynamic and leading-edge sport environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest competitive levels." It reflects the city's Corporate Vision: "Working together to create and sustain a vibrant, healthy, safe, and caring community." And it is also aligned with the provincial document, "Sport Plan for Alberta", although that is yet to be adopted.

"A comprehensive survey revealed the high value sport brings to the city, from tourism dollars to general spending by Calgarians to community and economic development," says Bjornson, adding that the sport policy was designed to reflect those findings. As a result, the city made a number of important commitments:

- To enable the independent sport council to represent the interest, goals, and objectives of amateur sport to City Council and the city's administration
- To enable the independent sport tourism authority to compete with other jurisdictions in the bidding and hosting of national and international sporting events
- To identify and prioritize sport programs and initiatives through partnerships with sport organizations and associations, businesses, community groups, and the federal, provincial, and other municipal governments
- To implement a multi-year funding strategy to provide sustainable, consistent, and predictable funds for sport infrastructure, programs, and initiatives
- To profile and market Calgary as a proactive sport community in its marketing materials
- To support community-based programs and initiatives that promote and facilitate accessibility
- To recognize the contribution of outstanding athletes, coaches, teams, and other individuals in an annual formal event

Next came the development of the strategic plan, which is slated to run until 2010. The plan's three objectives are achieving the recommendations of the sport policy, establishing Calgary as a leader in sport development, and significantly positioning the city in sport event tourism.

### **Role of the Stakeholders**

Through its Recreation Business Unit, the city “serves as a single window into the administration on sport issues and acts as a liaison and an operational complement” to the sport council and the sport tourism authority. This includes facilitating access to city-owned facilities, coordinating the city’s services and resources, and implementing the sport policy. The business unit ensures access to city-owned facilities, coordinates city services and resources, and develops and implements policy.

The sport council, which represents the city’s amateur sport organizations, collaborates with the business unit in recommending amateur sport requirements and priorities, and networks and develops partnerships with the private sector, including school boards and organizations delivering sport at the recreational level such as Boys and Girls Clubs. “We convince people that sport is good and stress the benefits of participation,” says Bjornson. “The focus is on providing quality opportunities and services so that sport is enjoyed and people continue to be lifelong participants, in tune with the Canadian Sport For Life \* model. We also support True Sport\*\*.” The sport council is charged with promoting amateur sport priorities, providing leadership, and identifying current and emerging issues that may have an impact on the development, growth, and sustainability of sport participation.

The sport tourism authority concentrates on providing “advice and strategic direction” in attracting major sport events that “bring significant benefits across a broad range of municipal priorities.”

The working relationship between the sport council and the sport tourism authority is defined by a Memorandum of Understanding.

### **The 10-Year Strategic Plan for Sport Facility Development and Enhancement**

In 2007, the sport council and the city launched a first-ever Sport Needs and Preference Study that laid the groundwork for the development of the facility strategic plan. The study involved 202 sport organizations, 47 sport facility operators, 46 national and provincial sport governing bodies, 12 secondary and post-secondary school organizations, 13 sport development organizations, and 1,500 citizens. “Infrastructure had emerged as the main issue for sport organizations because Calgary is in a facility deficit as a result of its tremendous and rapid growth,” says Bjornson. “This plan is the major work the sport council has done to date. It advances the benefits of amateur sport and addresses future facility needs.”

The study demonstrated that although sport participation is increasing, facility development has not kept pace; that sport organizations lacked the resources to develop, operate, and use facilities; that there was a need to enhance access; that participation was not available to all Calgarians; and that there was a need to establish priorities for facility development, enhancement, and accessibility.

The overall vision of the plan is to enable Calgarians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests. The plan is designed to foster strong sport delivery systems and establish sport facility priorities.

\* *Canadian Sport For Life is a movement to increase sport’s contribution in Canadian society recognizing sport as an important part of everyone’s life by promoting each child’s healthy and logical development in a sport or physical activity ([www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)).*

\*\**A nation-wide social movement powered by people who believe that sport can transform lives and communities ([www.truesportpur.ca](http://www.truesportpur.ca)).*

### **Guiding Principles of the Facility Strategic Plan**

- Provide opportunities for participation.
- Establish the significance of sport in order for investment to become a city priority.
- Support multi-sport facility design to accommodate the diversity of sport needs.
- Ensure the involvement of sport in decisions around recreation infrastructure investment.
- Optimize the use of existing infrastructures.
- Ensure effective distribution of new facilities throughout the city.
- Promote ease of access to facilities through a range of travel modes.
- Support facility operating sustainability by ensuring that cost not be prohibitive.
- Foster equitable access to facilities.

“The overall intent of the plan is to foster collaboration among stakeholders within the sport delivery system and coordination of resources, not just within the sport community, but with school boards and post-secondary institutions,” says Bjornson.

Criteria that are to be followed regarding facility development and enhancement are, in order of priority, adaptable design, community wellness, accessibility, sustainability, availability, and activity coverage. As well, priority is being given to specific facility types, including small/medium and large gymnasias, rectangular indoor fields, indoor ice arena and track, multi-purpose rooms, variously-shaped outdoor fields, and outdoor tracks.

The strategic objectives in the plan were to

- identify alternative sport and recreation facility development models.
- form partnerships in new facility development.
- demonstrate market demand for new facility development.
- address population growth in new communities.
- encourage adaptable design in sport facilities.
- enhance sport opportunities for new school facilities.
- foster access for all sport activities.
- incorporate national and international standards in new facilities.
- examine opportunities to extend or expand the use of sport fields.
- serve as a resource for sport development opportunities.

Existing facilities are obliged to examine opportunities for upgrading and expansion, address lifecycle and upgrade needs, ensure that the needs of the sport delivery system are considered as part of the school closure process, and upgrade school sport fields.

The plan includes four initiatives that reinforce strategies spelled out in the sport policy: communicate sport benefits and opportunities to the public; promote Calgary as a world centre for sport; promote sport registration and equipment assistance programs; and facilitate education and training opportunities for sport.

### **Building consensus**

Buy-in is critical to the success of Calgary’s sport initiatives and the sport council makes extensive use of educational seminars to make the pitch. “We talk to parents, coaches, administrators, and volunteers, trying to improve their knowledge of sport,” says Bjornson. “We always make the link to Canadian Sport For Life and explain that if you’re talking about the development of athletes, to whatever level they want to go, you need to understand growth and development. We now have advisory groups for the various types of facilities and we ask that they agree to accept Canadian Sport For Life and True Sport as part of their guiding principles. Our big role is to engage the sport community and that means a lot of talking.”

## Vancouver Inches Past Discussion Stage

In May 2008, the Vancouver Park Board and Vancouver City Council approved *Vancouver Sport for Life: Vancouver Sport Strategy*, the first step towards creating a single, city-wide vision for the future of sport in Vancouver. The culmination of a year of community consultation that included input from Vancouver's leaders in sport, the sport strategy provides "a roadmap for the way ahead in sport for all Vancouver residents and charts a course for a new approach to sport ... – Sport for Life ... and marks the beginning of a process to define the City's relationship with people who lead, volunteer, and participate in sport programs, events, facilities, and key stakeholders involved in sport." It should be noted that Vancouver is the first municipality to formulate a sport strategy within the Canadian Sport For Life framework.

Sport strategy coordinator Darren Peterson says that one motivation behind the strategy's development was to take advantage of sport's heightened profile as a result of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Another was recognition that with the Park Board traditionally focusing on community recreation and maintaining and allocating its facilities, organized sport was in the hands of local sport organizations, clubs, community centres, groups linked to provincial sport organizations, and the schools, with each operating independently and with little or no connection or integration. "A lot of discussion at City Hall was revolving around sport, arising out of an increase in inquiries and requests from sport event organizers interested in exploring sport business opportunities," says Peterson. "It didn't take the city long to realize that, with no one on staff responsible for sport, there was an obvious policy void. It was decided to ask the Park Board to develop a sport strategy."

Other factors include the creation of ActNow BC, a provincial wellness initiative aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle choices and environments, the introduction of a tax credit for sport programs, and the development of several municipal Sports Tourism Plans to attract sporting events.

The role of the Park Board is noteworthy because it is the only elected body of its kind in Canada. Its genesis is traceable back to 1886 and the first resolution of the first city council: to petition the federal government for the use of a 404-hectare acreage, renowned today as Stanley Park. A Park Committee designated to build trails and gardens became the Park Board in 1890. Today the park and recreation system includes more than 200 parks featuring community centres, pools, rinks, fitness centres, racquet courts, golf courses, pitch and putt courses, and marinas. "Having an elected Park Board is interesting," says Peterson. "It both complicates the terrain of governance and allows for a special focus on programming and facility development for parks, recreation, and sport."

Once the sport strategy was approved, the focus shifted to generating awareness and strengthening interaction among the potential client sport bodies and to date, reaction has been positive.

Peterson notes that political will is essential. "One reason this has been successful so far is that city councillors are supportive. The reality is that politicians supply funding and control the purse strings for an initiative like this and we've been able to roll this out a little bit quicker because of that.

### An Overview of the Vancouver Sport Strategy

**Vision:** By 2015, Vancouver will have a dynamic and forward-looking sport system that enables all its residents to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interest, resulting in a high level of participation and performance. Sport in Vancouver will be fair, inclusive, safe, and welcoming for all. Sport will be recognized for its significant contribution to the development and sustainability of the city and the health and wellness of its citizens.

"Key to understanding the sport strategy is that we're looking at the entire sport continuum, from introductory recreation programs and informal programs in daycare centres to high performance sport and Active for Life,"

says Peterson, who adds that measuring success will be a challenge. “A lot of this is subjective and it’s a start-up, so there aren’t a lot of baselines for comparison. And our approach is unique because it has a wide scope compared to other communities.”

As the sport policy states, its development “marks the beginning of a process to provide a framework for the city’s role in sport. The vision balances the pursuit of sport for its inherent value – for physical literacy, sport performance, and participation – with what sport can contribute to development, sustainability, health, and wellness within the city.”

To achieve the vision, the sport strategy addresses identified challenges: aging infrastructure; limited interaction and coordination of sport organizations; inequities in the development of physical literacy; rising obesity; lack of consistent and systematic program delivery; few facilities meeting national or international hosting standards; and a lack of facilities for sport excellence training. As well, more than half of top athletes who live in Vancouver train at venues located outside the city and comparatively few Vancouver athletes are achieving success in international or professional sport.

The sport strategy specifies outcomes, including more participation in sport, more and better hosted events, strategic investment in sport, coordination, reinforced acceptable standards, facilities used to full potential, and development priorities set.

### Six Strategic Goals

Adhering to the framework of the Canadian Sport For Life model, the sport strategy identifies strategic goals and measurement for success:

- *“Strengthened Interaction:* A coordinated approach is taken to sport development, with all stakeholders committed to partner-based leadership, effective connectivity, and open communication.” Success is measured through the establishment of a Vancouver Sport Network and annual progress updates on the number and variety of groups engaged in the network.
- *“Physical Literacy For All:* All children, from all segments, possess movement, sport, and decision-making skills to enjoy sport and physical activity for life.” Recorded participation by children in organized sport clubs, activities, and events is one measure of success as is tracking the number of organizations and programs with developmentally appropriate activities, quality standards, and qualified coaches.
- *“Active For Life:* All citizens, regardless of age, ability, physical capabilities, economic status, gender, culture, language, and location are aware, connected, and able to access the places and conditions that support structured and unstructured sport activity.” Success is measured through annual tracking of overall physical activity levels to assist in targeting programs and documenting outcomes.
- *“Enhanced Excellence:* The sport community is integrated and sustains a pool of athletes, coaches, officials, clubs, and training centres, systematically achieving results at provincial, national, and international competitions through fair and ethical means.” Success measurements include stakeholders engaged in the sport network, creating and implementing an Excellence Action Plan, hosting international events, and producing more champions.
- *“Quality Facilities for Participation and Performance:* A diverse range of accessible and welcoming facilities encourage all residents to pursue sport at any level of the Canadian Sport For Life model: Physical Literacy, Excellence, and Active for Life.” Success sees facility usage proportionate to capacity, facilities well maintained, and the facility base keeping pace with the requirements of Physical Literacy, Excellence, and Active for Life programming.
- *“Recognition as a Premier Event Destination:* Vancouver is recognized for strategically hosting events of all types that support tourism, economic, and sport development while leaving social and community legacies.” In place is an Event Hosting Action Plan with the resources and support to increase hosting capacity and specific targets identified up to including 2015.

## **Moving Forward**

That's the theory. What about the practice? Although it is early days, Peterson says that the focus on building community-wide buy-in is paying dividends. "We're working to strengthen interaction, increase communication flow, and making sure people better understand what the city's sport and recreation landscape looks like. No one has inventoried all the different players so we need to do that and then create linkages and opportunities for getting people with common interests together."

September 24, 2008, was a milestone as it marked the first annual Vancouver Sport Strategy Sport Summit. Aimed at key stakeholders in the sport community, the summit solicited input on activating the sport strategy. On the agenda were strategic goals and recommendations, options for moving the process forward and, of special interest, establishment of the Vancouver Sport Network that, says Peterson, is intended to serve as a collective voice for organized sport. Still in the works, the network will be a "multi-stakeholder advisory body linking sport with the City and other key service delivery agencies to steward the implementation of the sport strategy and advise on sport-related policy and facility and programming priorities."

Park Board staff has been assigned to support the implementation of the sport strategy and is working with the network to develop a formal mandate and define its roles, responsibilities, and functions. Ongoing, too, is forging of new partnerships with sport stakeholders, integrating with existing organizations and resources, recruiting members for the Vancouver Sport Strategy Implementation Committee, forming task teams for the implementation of the strategic goals, and creating a sport network identified as a measure of success in the first strategic goal.

Intended to be arms-length, the sport network will report to city council through the Park Board. Currently, the governance structure and membership criteria are being developed and the implementation committee is considering incorporation of the sport network and acquiring not-for-profit status. Once operational, the sport network is expected to oversee the implementation of the sport strategy, emerge as the "voice" of the sport community, advocate for sport interests to council, advise the Park Board on policy and priorities for capital development, sport hosting, and programming, develop sport partnership and economies of scale, and act as a communications clearing house.

It remains early days, but already the benefits of this initiative are evident, says Peterson. "We're bringing people together and working to build a better sport community. We're developing a forum for information exchange and for coordination between the city's clubs and organizations. We expect opportunities to work on collective projects, including coordinated training opportunities and volunteer and coach training."

Given that some of the impetus for the sport strategy came from hosting the 2010 Games, there is legitimate concern about keeping the momentum going once that event becomes history. "Right now people are excited so we haven't found any challenges in recruiting for our task committees and money is going into sport initiatives at the civic, provincial, and federal levels," says Peterson. "It will be a challenge to maintain the momentum, but turning the sport strategy into action will help. It needs to be understood that we're just getting our feet wet, that this is an ambitious undertaking. We're doing lots of presentations to the community sport groups so that there is a widespread understanding of what it is we're trying to do. This is definitely a long-term project from our perspective."

## **Sudbury's SportLink: Bringing the Sport Community Together**

That sport is a powerful economic driver is not lost on Canada's smaller municipalities. A prime example is Greater Sudbury, a city of 157,857 located 390 kilometres north of Toronto that serves as the regional capital of Northeastern Ontario. Here the tool is SportLink: Greater Sudbury Sport Council.

Its predecessor, the Sudbury and District Sports Central, which disbanded in the early 1980s, laid the foundation by assisting the sport community and helping to build the city's reputation as a venue of choice for world-class sporting events. It oversaw the development of high-profile athletes, coaches, and officials in a variety of sports. And it worked in partnership with many key community organizations.

Regardless of the size of a municipality, what matters is having the right people at the helm. Susan Levesque, SportLink's energetic and committed executive director, has held the job since February 2005. It was a position the Brock University graduate went after hard, believing her degrees in recreation and leisure studies and physical education, along with her passion for sport, made her uniquely qualified.

SportLink came into being in 2005 when concerned members of the local sport community recognized the need to beef up sport promotion and strengthen its potential to foster economic development through sport tourism. These "Founding Fathers", as Levesque calls them, are Paul Finley, former chair of the Northeastern Ontario Recreation Association now working in the city's Economic Development Department; Lionel Courtemanche, who worked for many years with the city's Leisure Services Department; Peter Merritt of Ontario's Ministry of Tourism and Recreation; and Doug Hannum, who worked with the Sport Alliance of Ontario (SAO).

As lean as an organization can be, SportLink consists of Levesque, occasionally an intern, and an 11-person board of directors with expertise in sport, media, event planning, volunteering, and administration. "An eclectic mix of representation is important, and that's what we have," says Levesque. "We may be a small group, but we are trying to get a lot done; our aim is to be movers and shakers in our community."

SportLink is one of 20 similar sport councils spread across Ontario under the aegis of the Ontario Community Sport Council. Although there are variations depending on a municipality's needs, by and large each council is composed of sport and recreation leaders and others "interested in the development of sport and recreation who work to build sport in a community or region. The councils serve as a forum for information exchange and coordination among sport clubs and associations. They also create independent, collective projects to support their community."

"We're all doing similar events, including large sport dinners and luncheons; what we have in common is the search for funding," says Levesque, adding that she is lobbying the SAO to fund the sport councils. "That only makes sense to me, so I keep on trying."

### **The SportLink Mission**

SportLink will utilize sport as a means for economic and community development by facilitating events, by leadership and educational opportunities, and by advocating communication and cooperation between community partners.

A large part of Levesque's job to date has been nailing down funding. The City of Greater Sudbury provides office space, access to phones and fax, two work stations and computers, and photocopying. As well, \$25,000 annually comes from its Community Economic Development Committee, an arm of the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation. SportLink's main funding has come from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, a leading charitable grant-making body that aims to strengthen volunteer capacity through investments in community-based initiatives such as SportLink. Other monies have come from Employment Ontario, the federal Department of Human Resources and Skill Development, Ontario's Ministry of Health Promotion, and the Canada Games Council (CGC), which contributed to SportLink's annual Canada Games Day program. This event, held on the campus of Laurentian University, offers youngsters, aged 11 to 13, a sport and educational experience that mirrors the excitement and spirit of the Canada Games. "My work is project driven and that's how I get my money," says Levesque. "The funders are looking at us to do projects such as Canada Games Day and the Trillium Foundation's funding workshops and support for liaison with sport groups."

To encourage economic development through sport tourism, SportLink has been invited to be a partner in developing a Sport Tourism Strategy along with Community Development, which is part of the city's Leisure Services Department, and Tourism, a division of the Department of Economic Development. SportLink also assists in bidding for and hosting events, developing sponsorship and advertising campaigns, publicizing events in tourism mediums, and facilitating transportation and accommodation. It provides access and information to government and other funding sources, offers guidance and information to sport groups seeking funding for events, and identifies and secures potential corporate sponsors. The latter is a key part of Levesque's job, particularly for popular annual events such as the fund-raiser Guts and Glory. Launched in 2006, this sit-down luncheon gives sports and local athletes a profile and is a forum for their inspirational and motivational messages.

Building volunteer capacity is a high priority and much of this is done by hosting a variety of workshops. Currently, Levesque is working with the 2010 Ontario Summer Games organizing committee to offer workshops to provincial sport organizations. "They want us to organize a whole slew over the next couple of years to build the capacity of our local volunteers to officiate."

SportLink relies heavily on the database on its website, up since June 2008, as a forum for bringing the sport community together (<http://www.sportlink.ca>). "It's our biggest marketing tool so we have put a lot of effort into developing the database, which contains contact information on every sport program in Sudbury," says Levesque, who is encouraged by the growing public interest in SportLink. "People call all the time; it has expanded 100-fold since I started so now I am totally immersed in the sport community."

Other SportLink activities include helping new clubs to promote events, incorporate, and bid for events, and facilitating meetings. "It's all about bringing people together so they can communicate, talk to each other, and collaborate," says Levesque.

Improved facilities are also on the agenda and actions include assessing needs for new facilities, identifying improvements to existing facilities, reviewing agreements between groups and facilities, and taking comprehensive inventories of facilities. In terms of the latter, Levesque is awaiting word from the funders in response to her request for a facilities inventory as part of the Sport Tourism Strategy.

Laurentian University is one of the region's prime sporting venues and SportLink board members serve on the Laurentian Task Force's \$4.2 million capital campaign to improve on-campus facilities. Phase One, in which a Mondo running track was installed, is complete and opens the door to hosting major athletics events. Phase Two is focused on repairs to out-buildings, washrooms, and the stadium.

Levesque has successfully sought support from local councillors. "A handful is very sport oriented," she says. "One is really into Guts and Glory and donates prizes for our raffles and draws. Another is partially responsible for the Valley East Hall of Fame, which puts on a recognition dinner. I phone or e-mail all of them whenever I have an event. Each year they've bought a table for Guts and Glory and I expect them to buy two this year; this is a strong indication of their support."

SportLink is indirectly involved with area coaches through its promotion of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). "We liaise with Cambrian College, which offers the NCCP, and then distribute the college calendar to all the sport groups who, in turn, distribute it to their coaches," says Levesque.

A recent initiative involving working with various adaptive sports has been an eye-opener for Levesque. "I am realizing that we have been missing a whole segment of our population," she says. "We have 21,000 adults and around 1,000 teenagers with a disability in the Sudbury area, and I now see that we need to promote adaptive sports, and that's what we're starting to do."

The move is welcome. "I run an adaptive rowing program as part of the Sudbury Rowing Club," says coach Thomas Merritt. "SportLink has helped me coordinate with other programs, clubs, and coaches in Sudbury and

across Ontario to support this program.” Echoing Merritt is Independent Living Sudbury Manitoulin executive director Judy Hyde: “There are very few opportunities for people with a disability to get involved with adapted sports program in Greater Sudbury. Our goal is to partner with SportLink and create some exciting new opportunities for the disabled community. Together we can further the cause of inclusion.”

Another example of progress is SportLink’s involvement with the new Northern Water Sports Centre, located on nearby Lake Ramsay, assisting their capital campaign to raise \$6 million for a building to house rowing, canoeing, kayaking, and dragon boat racing. The campaign is well underway thanks in part to a \$1 million donation from the mining giant Xstrata. Once complete, the facility will be the “regional centre of excellence for the development and delivery of recreational and competitive water sports programming and will also support its partners in hosting local, regional, national, and international events.” “SportLink assisted in organizing a group of Ramsay Lake users to get together and discuss common interests in the establishment of a temporary, on-water canoe, kayak, and rowing events racecourse,” says Don Waddell, project manager for the Centre. “The connections made and the distribution of information contributed to the success of the meeting and set up the requirement for ongoing meetings.”

So – early days but promising progress coming out of this one-person operation. It is an undertaking that bears watching.

*With files From The Sudbury Star, September 15, 2009*