Waterloo’s Cedar Valley SportsPlex

Recreation Services Manager Mark Gallagher, Leisure Services Director Paul Huting and Mayor Buck Clark on the fieldhouse turf of the Cedar Valley SportsPlex.

Where did the idea come from?

Clark: Boy, it’s a long story. There was a sporting facility planned in 2001 that would have been similar to this that was part of our riverfront renaissance program. We currently have the riverwalk loop, amphitheater, expo plaza because of that. There was a sports facility planned for that project that had issues due to a failed referendum pertaining to funding for the project. Almost immediately following that, a group of local citizens, led by Rick Young, recognized the need to have something like what you see today and began a campaign to raise funds for a privately-funded facility.

Tell me more about the funding.

Clark: The funding part of this was really a big deal--for Rick Young to go out and raise virtually $27 million in private donations and pledges.
is huge. Many of the community groups, gaming, foundations gave the largest pledge that they’ve ever given.

The city contributed the ground and paid for the demolition of the buildings that used to sit on this spot. Other than that, this was built entirely with private funds. We didn’t want any tax payer money, any general fund money, to go into the building of the facility itself.

**Explain the private funding, but city-run arrangement.**

*Clark:* The Waterloo Development Corporation (WDC), is a small group of private citizens that organized over 20 years ago, and their primary function is to assist and advise in the development of downtown Waterloo. WDC actually owns the SportsPlex facility.

*Huting:* The city leases it for a minimal fee per year until such time that it’s paid off, which is in eight years. At that point the city will own it for a dollar, and it will be 100-percent city-owned and operated.

**How is membership and participation?**

*Gallagher:* Our goal was around 1,500 units—which is an individual, a family membership counting as one. Now we’re at about 2,000, which equates to about 4,600 bodies. People have embraced it, but it’s not just Waterloo. It’s probably about 75 percent Waterloo, but also Cedar Falls and Waverly and Denver.

…The whole thing was sort of like throwing a party and hoping people show up. And they’ve definitely shown up and stayed through the summer months, which is great.

The other exciting thing is that this facility represents Waterloo. You get a good sample of all walks of the community in here. We really like that.

**Are the membership fees covering operating costs?**

*Clark:* Membership fees and activity fees are, yes. So there is a lot of revenue other than just memberships—renting meetings rooms, Cedar Valley Soccer Club and other partnerships.

*Huting:* We worked extensively with Mid-American Energy and our architect to minimize our energy consumption. That has significantly helped us stay in the black with this facility.

*Gallagher:* Each of those choices came with a cost to WDC, and more fundraising. Those decisions have helped us, and WDC really understood the importance of those choices. They wanted the building to operate efficiently and didn’t want the building to become a burden for tax payers.

**Tell me about the amenities.**

*Gallagher:* A gym for basketball or pickle ball or whatever; it’s a pretty flexible space. The field house and indoor turf, and batting cages, meeting space, childcare, indoor play area, weight, cardio equipment, a 1/6 of a mile track, golf simulator and a leisure pool.

The other thing is all the partnerships in the community that have come from this—a non-profit that serves special needs adults, businesses who use meeting space or turf for teambuilding, local soccer groups.

**Advice for other communities?**

*Huting:* Prepare for the naysayers, because they are going to be out there. They are going to make a lot of noise. They are going to be mean and nasty, and you just have to keep your cool. We had great support, obviously, because you see the building here today. But there were significant naysayers who came to a lot of council meetings and gave the mayor an awful hard time. It didn’t bring us down, but it wasn’t fun.

**What else should we know?**

*Gallagher:* There’s a neat synergy to all this, too. Now, everything we do—baseball, swimming pools, recreation programs—generates out of this building. Having our registration here is more central and we’re open longer and more accessible. We can sell a pool pass to someone who never got one before, but they are members here and learned more. Or someone comes here to sign-up for baseball; they start asking questions, go on a tour and buy a membership.

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