

THE HISTORY OF THE NAVAN CURLING CLUB

Presented by Ross Bradley to the Cumberland Township Historical society at the Navan Curling Club on Wednesday, September 3rd, 2008.

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the history of the Navan Curling Club. Most presentations made at meetings of the Cumberland Township Historical Society cover histories that go far back in time and bring back great information and wonderful memories of the organizations, events and families that have contributed so much to our history here in Cumberland. What I will speak about tonight is a very recent part of the history in Cumberland. This is a subject dear to my heart. In preparation I have enjoyed going back into the records and reliving so many of the events that were taking place as the project of building the Navan Curling Club was working its way through to eventual reality.

The Navan Curling Club was established on April 25, 1984 at a meeting held in the Navan Memorial Community Centre Hall. Forty persons attended this meeting. There appeared to be much enthusiasm from those attending to establish a Club and subsequently that evening an executive was chosen so the Navan Curling Club was then on its way. The executive was: President, Ross Bradley; Vice President, Tony Edwards; Secretary, Tom Hardiman; Treasurer, Ken Smith.

The brand new Curling Club which was just established of course had no building in which to curl, no land upon which to build a curling rink, no members, and absolutely no money at all. So why did it seem necessary to create a brand new Club? The answer to that question was that there were a lot of people around who thought they would like to curl close to home. Curling was gaining in popularity throughout the country. So why didn't they choose to curl at the R.C.M.P. Club in Manor Park or at the Curling Club in Cumberland? Both of these were good Clubs, were relatively close by but both had full memberships for several years so this did not seem to be an option.

The 1984-1985 curling season found the Navan Club curling at the R.A. Curling Club on Riverside Drive in Ottawa on Sunday evenings. Six sheets of ice were rented to handle the 48 curlers. The second season, 1985 - 1986, there were 96 curlers so twelve sheets were rented to handle those that were willing to travel into Ottawa every Sunday night for 25 weeks from October to mid-April. The number of curlers rose to 120 for the next three years and this occurred at the Ottawa Curling Club on O'Connor St. in Ottawa, one of the oldest curling clubs in Canada. Renting ice continued for a total of seven years, up until 1990-1991. That in itself proved that there was real interest in curling close to home. Sacrificing family social life on Sunday evenings had just about reached a limit.

In the spring of 1986 serious discussion began on where the Club should locate. It centered around the feasibility of locating in the Blue building which was owned by the Cumberland Township Agricultural Society. This building was built in 1976 as an exhibition building for the Navan Fair. It had the potential to house a curling club. A feasibility study was undertaken by Kostuch Engineering in Ottawa. After extensive discussion with the Agricultural Society it became apparent that this would

not be an option. It was too wide a building for two sheets of curling ice and it was too narrow for three sheets. It also housed the Eastern Valley Cooperative Nursery School which was providing a good service to the community and it was well established so this idea was abandoned. It was a disappointing turn of events because it did have the preliminary potential to be a multi-purpose facility. In fact while discussions were underway it had been referred to as the "Agriplex" which tended to give it that multi-purpose feeling. It would have served the Navan Fair, the well-established Nursery School and the new Curling Club.

Moving from the "Agriplex", land just east of the Domes in the Fairgrounds was considered. Negotiations reconvened with the Agricultural Society, an architect was taken on to design a four sheet curling club. In those days a four sheet club was considered a viable operation for success. The rule of thumb then was the cost would be about \$250,000 per sheet and that would mean a total cost of about one million dollars. The Agricultural Society was not in favour of selling land to the Curling Club but it was willing to consider a long term lease for sufficient lands for the Curling Club's purpose. Even though the Club had been feverishly fund raising all along it was nowhere close to having what would be needed to undertake a project like this, nor would it be for years and years to come. So financial institutions had to be approached for a mortgage. This would not happen because mortgages would not be available if the new Club was located on leased land. So this possibility just east of the Domes had to be abandoned as well.

Now what? The next site to pursue on the Fairgrounds was right where the Club is now located. To do this the Agricultural Society would have to agree to sell the land and the Township of Cumberland had to become involved too because several of their rights of way crossed this piece of land from Fairgreen Avenue to the Centennial Park, built in 1968 and the Tennis Courts built in 1976. The Fairgrounds had always been considered by many communities to be an ideal place for a curling club. The Ottawa area had several good examples. They stretched all the way from Russell and Metcalfe on the southeast to Richmond and Carp on the west. The Curling Club made a proposal to the Cumberland Township Council in January, 1987 to make available to the Navan Curling Club sufficient lands for a curling rink. The size of the land parcel was 126' along Fairgreen and 250' deep. Agreement was established between the Agricultural Society and the Curling Club for the Agricultural Society to have full enjoyment of land and facility use for three weeks in August each year - the week before the Annual Fair, the week of and the week after. The Agreement was signed May 24, 1991. Now to find sufficient funds to actually proceed with the construction of the building to house the Navan Curling Club. During the 1980's the Province of Ontario had a program of making grants available through the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. Funds came from the Ontario Lottery Corporation through the sale of Wintario lottery tickets. A prime example of a Wintario grant right here was the reconstruction of the Navan Arena in 1982. During the late 1980's, funds from this grant source became difficult to secure. The period from 1986 to 1989, the Club made three applications to the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. The first was turned down because the Club had not been incorporated for a full year (it was incorporated April 22 1987 as a private non-profit corporation), the second refusal was because of the Township's higher priority for the Ray Friel Complex. The third application was successful. A grant of \$250,000 was presented to the Navan Curling Club on Friday, January 13, 1989 at a special meeting of the Township of Cumberland Council in Leonard, by Jean Poirier, MPP

for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. The general feeling of course was that things would go smoothly now that funds were in place. This however wasn't altogether true.

McNeely Engineering designed the building to specifications provided by the Curling Club's building committee. Tenders were advertised in Ottawa newspapers in June 1989 and opened on June 30, 1989. The lowest tender was over budget by \$300,000 and the highest by \$800,000. The project was again in a crisis mode because these amounts were too high. In September 1989, the Club's building committee met with Dercon Construction (Ron Conway, in Russell). The project was redesigned. New project costs were estimated at \$900,000. These were eventually pared down to \$750,000. In May, 1990 Dercon Construction began work on the project. In December 1990 ground was broken for construction of the building. In January 1991 the steel structure was put in place. Mortgage funds were made available from Trillium Caisse Populaire, Vanier. The Caisse became concerned about the possibility of soil contamination seepage on the site because of the proximity of a garage on Colonial Avenue. Golders Associates, Consulting Engineers were taken on to study this matter. Thank goodness they determined there was no soil contamination.

In October of 1991 the Occupancy Permit from the Township's Planning Department was received by the Curling Club. The very next day the Curling Club hosted the Presidents of about 80 curling clubs of the Ottawa Valley Curling Association, at their annual pre-season dinner. The Navan Curling Club was officially opened on November 2, 1991 by Don Boudria, MP, Jean Poirier, MPP and by our very own Mayor of Cumberland Township, Brian Coburn. I must say that during this whole hectic time of constructing the Curling Club, my brother, Lorne Bradley, was President of the Navan Curling Club. Lorne took sick in August 1991, was present at the official opening in November and died in December. Lorne desperately wanted the Curling Club here in Navan. He was involved in throwing the first curling stone in the new Club, but he never played a game in the place he worked so hard to see built. The cost of the Club with its furnishings and equipment was a little over \$1,000,000.

For the next 14 years the Club operated very well, relying on thousands of volunteer hours by the members for everything from carpentry to painting to managing, etc. The Club had been so successful that it had to consider expansion. In April, 2004 an expansion committee was put in place. Construction for this expansion was completed in the summer of 2005 by Ron Conway and again, many, many hours from Club volunteers. The lounge area and the basement area doubled in size. The Club is now well able to serve its regular curling program and the many bonspiels that occur throughout the curling season. In the off curling season it has been proven to be an excellent place for birthday, anniversary parties and even weddings where 125 people can easily be accommodated at a sit down dinner. The Navan Lions Club, because of its substantial financial contribution towards the construction of the Club, has a permanent home in the basement called the Lions Den. This room is also available to groups in the community for meetings by arranging through the Curling Club's manager.

The Navan Curling Club is about to begin its 25th season next month. Its history has gone from great enthusiasm of 100+ curlers in its first few years, to very difficult times attempting to secure land and adequate funds for its construction in the next few years, to its good fortune of having arguably the best ice conditions in its entire

history of any curling club within the Ottawa Valley Curling Association. Good ice is paramount to the success of any curling club. It now has over 500 curlers, over half of which come from the rapidly expanding Orleans area and the remainder from Blackburn Hamlet on the west side to the rural part of Cumberland and all the way to Clarence Rockland on the east. The membership is a marvelous blend of urbanites and ruralites and the two major language groups in this part of Eastern Ontario. It's a fun place to be. The Daytime curlers use the Club from 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday. The regular adult program is every evening from 7pm on and the little rock (ages 7 to 12) and other youth up to 19 years are on Sundays from 10am on. Curling Clinics are made available at the beginning of each season and are conducted by excellent trained and certified instructors from the Club. The curling season runs from October to mid-April.

I believe the Navan Curling Club to be a tremendous social and recreational asset for all of Cumberland. Thank you again for inviting me to speak tonight.

Ross Bradley