

Bright lights, small city

Martensville, a city of 10,000 in the shadow of Saskatoon, wasn't going to take second place when it came to soliciting partners for its planned 50,000 square foot athletic centre. Even though the centre was fully funded, with \$11.1 million committed from the city and \$1.4 million coming from the province, civic leaders felt that corporate partners could supply a few bells and whistles.

Clearly, little Martensville thinks big. It figured that if companies were willing to name a big venue in Saskatoon, shouldn't they also be interested in naming a piece of the biggest venue in Martensville? **The city hired Performance Sponsorship Group (PSG) to handle inventory valuation and sales. This is PSG's bread and butter, of course, but its name is most often associated with far more substantial projects, such as Credit Union Centre and TCU Place, both in neighbouring Saskatoon.**

Bringing in a hired gun turned out to be a worthwhile investment, says Dillon Shewchuk, Community/Economic Development Manager. Pretty much the entire inventory was sold over a six week period, during which **Judy Haber, PSG's Senior Partner, made two whirlwind sales visits to the city. The take to date is modest – approximately \$750,000 over the next five to 10 years,** less sales costs – but Shewchuk maintains it's far better than the city would have managed on its own.

Martensville does have certain distinctive advantages. It's a fast-growing city in a fast-growing province. For local companies seeking to stand out, the new athletic centre is the only game in town. Everybody buys radio, television and print advertising, says Shewchuk. But to name a piece of a venue? That's different. There are a few recreation options in Martensville, says Shewchuk, but once the new centre opens, it will be the town's centre of activity. Everybody in town will go there, likely several times.

Following the completion of the inventory and valuation, Shewchuk and his colleagues prepared a list of likely prospects, all local businesses. **According to Haber, the sales process was remarkably quick, with deals closed in parking lots and on restaurant tables with the likes of Affinity Credit Union (financial services), North Prairie Developments (residential home developer), TR Petroleum (gas station), Hallmark Realty (real estate), TRX RV (RV dealer), Duroc Homes (residential contractor), Dairy Queen (QSR), JJ Landscaping (landscaping), Mocon Construction (excavation).**

Haber says exclusivity was a strong selling point. You can't get that with advertising, and prospects were eager to block actual or potential competitors. Term and price were also important, she says. It's a small market and the valuation reflected that. Pricing was very competitive with available local media, better by some metrics. Terms were mostly set at five years, short for a naming, but a comfortable term for a small business owner who knows from experience that today's strong local economy will certainly not last forever.

As a salesperson, one accustomed to having decisions hang in the balance as they found their way through a maze of mandatory corporate approvals, **Haber says this process was particularly refreshing. All of the buyers were under the age of 40, she estimates, and all were entrepreneurs comfortable spending their money as they saw fit.**

"I had people making hundred thousand dollar decisions in seven minutes," she says.

Judy Haber will share the secrets that have made her one of the country's top salespersons at this year's Sponsorship Toronto.

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