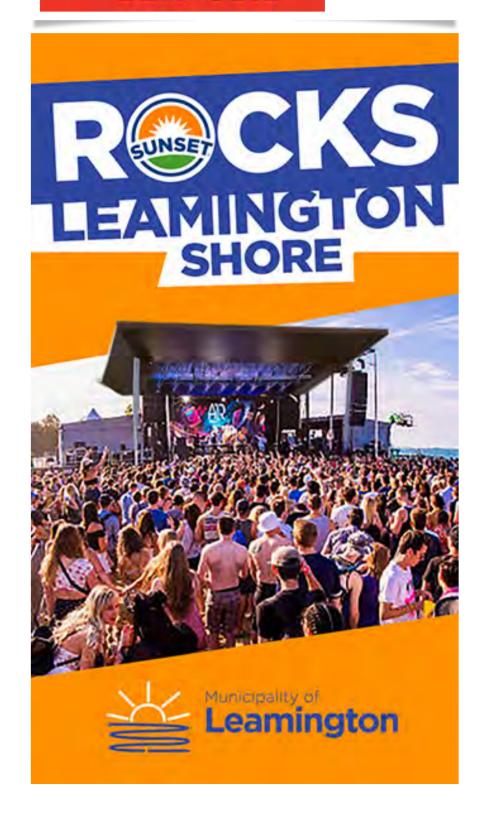
## Sponsorship REPORT

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## In the midst of a pandemic, Leamington closes a naming rights deal

In the middle of what was arguably the worst week the world had endured in a century, the Ontario town of Leamington closed a six-figure naming rights deal.

It may be some time before people again congregate in numbers at Leamington's recently completed outdoor amphitheatre located near the shores of Lake Erie in Seacliff Park. The venue features a covered stage, a concrete pad that seats 300, and capacity for another 5,700 on the surrounding grounds. When they do, they'll be gathering at Sunset Stadium. Sunset is a national brand of Mastronardi Produce, a large family-owned local greenhouse operator.

Judy Haber of Performance Sponsorship Group, who brokered the sale, says the term is 10 years and the rights fee is in "the high six figures."

And it happened over the course of a week. Haber says her first meeting with Mastronardi took place March 19. The deal was approved by municipal council on March 25 and announced publicly on March 26.

Mastronardi Produce is a fourth-generation local company that has stepped up before to support the community in a big way. When Heinz closed up shop in 2014 after more than a century of operation in Leamington, Mastronardi stepped in to keep alive the town's mid-summer tomato festival, a seasonal highlight. Sunset titled the tomato festival in 2014 and 2015, after which it was supplanted by a broader food festival.

"Companies buy in municipalities because they care about their community," Haber says. "The harder the times are for the community, and their employees and their families, the more inclined companies are going to be to support them."

In this case, says Haber, "it's not about return on investment or how much it was valued for when we did the valuation." It's about a genuine desire to support the community in a time of need, she says. If you approach the right person at the right time with the right offer, you can sell naming rights in the middle of a global pandemic.

Haber says there were actually two offers on the table; the other offered the same fee, but sought naming rights in perpetuity. Haber says she advised her client firmly against granting rights in perpetuity. It's a decision that will haunt municipalities in future deals, she warns.

"Perpetuity is not a term that we use in sponsorship," she says "Regardless of the times, we should never be in a position where we settle on terms or fees." Negotiate, yes. Settle or compromise, never.

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