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Goodfish Lake looks to build greenest arena in Canada

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Although the ground has yet to be broken, the community of Goodfish Lake (Whitefish Lake First Nation #128) could one day be home to the country's first ever recreational ECOdome – a building that would house an NHL-size ice rink, along with a fitness centre, café, community kitchen, daycare centre, and even the satellite campus for Portage College.

The project is estimated to cost \$10 million, which, according to Goodfish Lake Community Development Foundation President Melvin Steinhauer, is about half the cost of the first arena design that was explored.

And although the construction of the arena is not a certainty, the band anticipates to start the project this year, says Steinhauer. If in fact the project does move forward, it is estimated that the construction of the ECOdome could be complete in just six months. Therefore, if the construction begins this spring, the arena could be up and running for the 2010-11 hockey season.

The foundation is looking to businesses and other organizations to support the project, and in return, various parts of the building would be named after those donors.

"I know we can do it," says Steinhauer. He adds that the foundation "is not building this building to make money," but instead, the facility is to be built "for the whole community."

Chief James Jackson shares this belief. The project, he says, could mean recreational programming for youth and a community-gathering place.

He adds that when the past arena existed, it acted as "a centre for the community" and brought people closer together.

The previous 2,200 square foot arena at Goodfish Lake burnt to the ground in the summer of 2005. The arena was undergoing renovations when the fire occurred. Plans to construct a new arena have been taking place for the past two years.

The idea of the ECOdome looks "at a new concept of combining the environment aspect as well as mitigating water, heating, and cooling costs," says Jackson, who adds that currently, there are over 60 minor hockey players from Goodfish Lake who must travel to surrounding communities to play hockey.

According to the fundraising consultant hired by the foundation, Rick Adam, the ECOdome is "cheaper to build, it's disaster proof, and costs about 50 per cent less to heat and cool." Technically, "a tornado could roll right over the top of it," adds Adam.

Since the building is 99 per cent concrete, it is less susceptible to fire or deterioration. The design will also allow for the NHL-quality ice to be in the facility year-round. A six-inch cover will be available to cover the ice surface, to allow for other community events to take place, such as concerts or even basketball games.

One of the foundation's focuses is to be the first in Canada to build this type of facility, which fits with the "progressive mindset" of the band, says Adam. "It's quite the facility. It's going to be amazing."

Adam hopes the ECOdome planned for Goodfish Lake is just "one of many," and that the community can act as an example to show other groups that this type of facility can be built.

The proposed facility is to be built directly across from the current administration building in the Goodfish Lake town site.

Calgary Flames

To help move the project along and round up support, the foundation has recruited Calgary Flames forward Rene Bourque as the honorary chair of the Goodfish Lake Recreational Centre Capital Campaign.

Bourque played AAA Midget hockey in Goodfish Lake as a youth.

"I have never forgotten my roots in the Goodfish Lake region," says Bourque in a press release sent out by the foundation. "I know how important it is to have first-rate recreation facilities when growing up and participating in recreational activities and I feel privileged to be the honorary chair of the campaign to raise money for the

much-needed centre.

"I urge businesses and families to become involved and I hope that my support encourages others to get on board, to become part of a project that will be truly transformational," says Bourque.