

Hundreds attend ribbon-cutting ceremony at Zancor Centre

By Jim Stewart

Hundreds of residents, visitors, and dignitaries attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony in the Municipal Maintenance Athletic Centre at the Zancor Centre on Sunday morning. The grand entrance of Premier Doug Ford, MPP Stephen Lecce, and Mayor Steve Pellegrini through the north doors caused a stir among those assembled for the 9 a.m. event. Premier Ford, Minister Lecce, and Mayor Pellegrini traversed the length of the artificial turf field along the synthetic track. The gregarious trio mingled freely with hundreds of folks assembled on the tarped multipurpose sports court prior to the ceremony. The Premier was in full electioneering mode as if the writ had been dropped. It was a dynamic, politically-charged event. With a provincial election imminent and Donald Trump spewing anti-Canadian invective in his first week back in the White House, the content of the Official Opening speeches reflected last week's intriguing political developments. Mayor Pellegrini emceed the ceremony and was flanked by 18 dignitaries who spanned the width of the artificial turf field. On hand were King Councillors Jordan Cescolini, Debbie Schaefer, Avia Eek, Mary Asselstine, Jennifer Anstey, and David Boyd as well as Uxbridge Mayor Dave Barton, Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Iain Lovatt, Aurora Mayor Tom Mrakas, East Gwillimbury Mayor Virginia Hackson, and Vaughan Mayor Stephen Del Duca. Other dignitaries included Seneca Polytechnic President David Agnew, Vaughan-Woodbridge MPP Michael Tibollo, and King-Vaughan MP Anna Roberts. The mayor noted in his introductory remarks that "This project has been twenty years in the making. This has been my dream." The congenial civic leader jolted the solemnity of the occasion when he pulled his Speedo from a jacket pocket—an artifact from his lifeguarding days. The moment of levity served as a reminder that King residents had to travel for decades to surrounding towns to use recreational swimming pools and he pointed to the Aqua Tech Solutions Aquatic Centre as "a place to improve the physical fitness of residents. This facility is a miracle. It was built with only \$678,000 of local tax-supported dollars." Mayor Pellegrini thanked the partners assembled for their generous support and noted the "significant contributions of \$21.1M from the Canadian government, \$17.6M from the Ontario government, and \$20M from developers' charges that made the Zancor Centre possible. We're sitting on 25 acres due to our partners at Seneca Polytechnic who provided the land for \$1 per year for the next 99 years." The mayor applauded Zancor Homes, JTF Homes, and Country Day School for purchasing naming rights to the facility and the two ice hockey rinks. As a segue into the Premier's speech, Pellegrini presented Ford with a navy blue King Junior A Rebellion jacket which the Conservative leader donned immediately. Premier Ford expressed his gratitude for the Rebellion gear and praised the state of the art recreation complex: "What a spectacular facility. Recreational facilities bring the community together." He noted that "It's great to be back in beautiful King" and acknowledged the importance of intergovernmental cooperation: "You can't do this without many partners." Ford also projected the prospective careers of current facility users: "Future Olympic athletes and NHL players could be working out and competing at this recreation facility." Lastly, the Premier praised the unity of purpose that created the Zancor Centre and suggested the limitations of political partisanship: "I don't give two hoots about political stripes. It's important that we work together." Ford's remarks about political unity in Ontario and, by extension, Canada elicited a hearty round of applause from an appreciative audience and led to a smooth segue to Mayor Pellegrini's introduction of Seneca Polytechnic President David Agnew. King's mayor noted that with "only 9,500 households in King, we couldn't have built this facility without the help of partners such as Seneca." President Agnew acknowledged that "the property on which Seneca's King Campus is situated and the twenty-five acres that have been leased to King Township for 99 years were purchased from the Eaton family in 1972." The importance of history and cooperation was echoed by MPP Lecce who joined Pellegrini on stage and offered an amusing remark about the mayor's Speedo before reinforcing the importance of keeping political promises. As King's MPP, Lecce secured a \$17.6 million investment to ensure the centre's completion—the largest provincial infrastructure investment in King's history. He noted triumphantly that "after delivering the largest infrastructure investment in the history of King Township to build the Zancor Recreation Centre, I proudly stand with Premier Ford and Mayor Pellegrini to officially open it. A promise made—a promise kept." Lecce also observed "how many times Premier Ford has said 'yes' to King. I remember mentioning to him that we needed just \$17 million. Because of our Premier's support, this project will be with us for the next 99 years and longer." Lecce's upbeat remarks elicited much applause. Vaughan-Woodbridge MPP and Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Michael Tibollo reinforced the theme of national unity and thanked former MP Deb Schulte for her dedication to the building of the Township Wide Recreation Complex: "This project was championed by Deb and she passed the baton." In addition to praising Schulte, Tibollo

pointed to the importance of infrastructure project investments across the country: "Infrastructure is the backbone of any country. It creates spaces for us to come together. It's incredible what we can do when we work together. These are safe and welcoming places for us to go. There is nothing that can stop Canadians from working together. There is only Team Canada." Tibollo's call for national political cooperation was echoed by MP Anna Roberts after she, too, offered a humorous remark about Mayor Pellegrini's Speedo. After the laughter subsided, Roberts's remarks reinforced the event's recurring theme: "This is about working together to achieve the goals of the future. This recreation complex will be a safe space for our children -- a great place to raise our families. We now have a world class facility in King." Prior to her exit from the stage, Roberts presented a commemorative certificate from the federal government to the mayor and his council to mark the official opening of the Zancor Centre. After the speeches were delivered and the obligatory group photos were completed, hundreds of attendees poured out into the Zancor Centre's sunlit foyer where dozens of community organizations had set up information booths. The displays spanned the length of the facility and included kiosks sponsored by King Heritage and Cultural Centre, King Curling Club, King United Soccer Club, King Township Recreation Programs, Central York Panthers Girls Hockey Association, Seneca Polytechnic, and the King Rebellion Junior A Hockey Team. Tours of the facility were conducted by King Township staff and the Zancor Centre sprang to life when its ice rinks, turf field, track, pools, basketball court, and community meeting areas were filled with recreating residents. Adding to the ambience of these healthy activities was the aroma of pancakes and sausages on the griddle as folks lined up for the Mayor's Annual Pancake Breakfast prepared so ably by the King City Lions Club.