

# THE Sponsorship REPORT

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## RAISING THE BAR ON PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

***Saskatoon's new Shaw Centre is designed to serve the needs of two adjacent high schools as well as the local community***

CARY HUMPHREY, INTEGRATED Facility Coordinator for Saskatoon's Blairmore Centre, jokes that Saskatchewan's rural heritage has taught its leaders to embrace creative solutions to thorny issues. It's as good an explanation as any for the relative ease with which the city and two different school boards came together, not only to draw up plans for two high schools, joined by a city-owned community centre, but also to seek – indeed welcome – corporate partners to enter the mix.

Several announcements of corporate partners are still pending. The first was made last month, when Shaw Communications Inc. announced that it had acquired naming rights to the community centre for the next 15 years at a rights fee of \$1.3 million, payable in equal annual installments. Formal groundbreaking has yet to occur, but the first payment is already in the bank. The full facility is scheduled to open in the fall of 2008.

The deal is the third in Saskatoon by Toronto's Performance Sponsorship Group. Previously, it sold naming rights to TCU Place (arts and convention centre) and Credit Union Place (sports and entertainment complex). "Cities can access support from the corporate sector to build what we call essential services," says PSG's Senior Partner Judy Haber, hailing this as "a model for public-private partnerships."

Private support was necessary. The two high schools and the community centre were to be the heart of a new residential development, known as the Blairmore suburban area, that will eventually be home to 35,000 to 40,000 residents in mixed single-family and multifamily housing. When final plans came in over budget, administrators suggested that private funding be sought, and council approved.

The design of the facility made it a particularly attractive corporate opportunity. That same design might also have made it a political hot potato in many cities, as the

community centre would serve in large measure as common ground between two high schools. But the only restriction imposed by the school boards was that companies involved in alcohol or tobacco be excluded. When Shaw was introduced as the private-sector partner at a public meeting of City Council, Humphrey says there was nary a peep of protest. Shaw's bread and butter is cable and Internet, where it dominates the Saskatchewan market. It is now also a small player in the digital phone space, which is a new line of business.

Shaw is a family owned company. It is attracted to opportunities with a community link that promote strong family values, explains Merin Coutts, Regional Manager, Shaw Cablesystems G.P. In fact, despite its clear commercial potential, the \$1.3 million investment in the Shaw Centre was approved not by Shaw's marketing management, but by its charitable donations committee.

But there is no question that this appears to be a very good business deal for Shaw. Though the Shaw Centre will certainly serve the recreational needs of the community, it also affords Shaw several unique marketing benefits aside from the obvious name on the marquee. Foremost among them is the ability to communicate daily to students from two high schools for the full duration of their high school education.

The Shaw Centre will house a high performance swimming pool that will serve the entire city, a leisure pool, two gyms, a walking track, fitness centre and an eatery. The grounds will include soccer and baseball fields, and a playground. Use of several of the facilities, including the gyms, will be shared with Tommy Douglas Collegiate, a public high school now under construction adjacent to the Shaw Centre's west wall, and Bethlehem Catholic High School, now under construction adjacent to the Shaw Centre's east wall. A corridor will link the two schools and the shared facilities, giving the Shaw Centre access to daily foot traffic from some 1,850 students, in addition to the intermittent traffic from community users. "A lot of centres have that regular attendance, but because it's attached to both schools, it's long-term," says Coutts. "Every day for three years they will have exposure, not only to seeing the Shaw Centre, but actually enjoying and participating in functions that utilize the facility itself."

Included in the Shaw Centre will be a product display area, where "the users of the facility can interact with the products that Shaw offers." Details are still being worked out.

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