

Wellness complex a symbol of community

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WELLAND — Claire Pym used to be the program co-ordinator at the Rose City Seniors Activity Centre.

On Tuesday she had come from Paris, Ont., to the see dream of so many of her former clients realized.

"I'm speechless, I wish I was back working here again," she said. "I can't believe this is happening."

The centre, after undergoing \$9 million in renovations and a name change to Welland Community Wellness Complex, had its official grand opening and ribbon-cutting Tuesday attended by more than 300 invited guests.

The project brings to fruition a dream centre seniors had held dear for more than 12 years.

The expanded facility now includes a 400-seat theatre, therapeutic pool, a fitness room with sports-training equipment, wood shop, computer lab, aerobics studio, expanded cafeteria and library.

The centre will also now welcome youth. There will be baby-sitting courses, billiards, hip-hop dance classes, kick boxing, youth theatre and yoga instruction offered among a much more full plate of programming.

"This building was designed to enhance the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities," said Richard Morwald, the city's manager of recreation and culture.

"There's been a steady line of people registering for programs and Well passes and that's something to celebrate."

He said grand opening festivities which started on Saturday have been well attended.

Henry O'Keefe, chair of the Rose City Seniors Centre Foundation, the centre's fundraising arm, said by the mid-90s club membership was almost 1,300, but the building was only meant to accommodate 400 people. In 1999 the seniors reached a deal with the city council of the time that stated the seniors had to pay for the furnishings of the building.

Hard economic times forced plans to halt. When provincial and federal governments offered grants for community projects the seniors applied — but they were rejected because the project had to benefit the entire community.

"You couldn't have a facility like this if it wasn't meant to serve the needs of the entire community," O'Keefe said.

Those grants sparked the change from seniors centre to community centre.

Mayor Barry Sharpe said the centre had always been an asset and it was an exceptional centre, but with a \$9 million investment it could offer more programming.

"It excites me because of its past and because it has the potential to benefit the entire community," he said.

City manager Craig Stirtzinger is excited about the completion of the building.

"Where this building used to symbolize the value this city put on seniors, it now symbolizes the how much we value everyone in this community," he said.

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