

PAECS out to raise \$5 million to complete centre

By George Brown

Ponoka is continuing to build on its legacy of agriculture and enterprise with the development of the new ag event centre.

An update on construction of the main arena was presented to community and business leaders last month.

And there was a call for community and business level financial sponsorship to raise \$5 million to complete landscaping of the grounds and build a 200-stall barn.

"This campaign is intended to assist us in completing construction of a major stabling facility, site work, specialized equipment and completion of the building's second floor, which will include a major banquet facility and some classrooms," explained Charlie Cutforth, president of the Ponoka Ag Event Centre Society (PAECS). "It's going to be a very impressive facility."

The project is a 75,000-square-foot ag event centre with an indoor arena with a dirt floor and 1,500 seats (expandable to 2,500), a banquet room, and lobby and concession areas. The outdoor components include two barns, stock pens, trailer and car parking, and RV camping.

The society has already received a \$3,204,904 Major Community Facilities Program (MCFP) grant from the provincial government.

EnCana is the major corporate sponsor at this point, committing \$500,000. The four founding partners have provided funds or gifts in kind: Ponoka County, \$1.7 million; Ponoka Stampede Association, 15 acres of land valued at \$500,000; Ponoka Agricultural Society, \$275,000; and the Town of Ponoka, \$150,000. The Alberta government has also contributed a \$500,000 grant from the Centennial Legacy program.

Cutforth presented Mixcor Aggregates, Servus Credit Union, ATB Financial and Farm Credit Canada as recent donors to the project.

Mixcor president Terry Mix said his family believes in the project and what it will do to help build the community. Construction of the ag event centre shows Ponoka is serious about agriculture and puts the town at the "epicenter for agriculture in Alberta." It is the Mix family's business practice to leave communities in better shape than when they moved in, he added, something all businesses should consider.

Cutforth said the ag event centre is an example of what can be done when residents, community groups, government and businesses work together toward a common goal.

With the building taking shape under the direction of Stretch Construction, Cutforth says more businesses are coming forward to enquire about advertising and sponsorship opportunities.

"We understand the pressure business is under to fund various activities and projects," he added. "And we also understand the economic reality that exists today."

The ag event centre will have a "tremendous impact" on the community, Cutforth said. There are already businesses, including a hotel, looking to move to Ponoka because of the spinoff from the ag event centre.

"We believe the economic growth this centre will generate will help make it feasible (for) the future modernization of the arena complex and other necessary services in the community," he told the businesspeople. "We should all be as committed to those projects when they are ready to be done as we are this one."

All work on the project that could be done by local businesses has been, Cutforth said. "If we expected the community to be onside and would then buy in then we certainly had to ensure that as much work as possible in the construction of the project could be done with local forces and suppliers as well."

There is already a waiting list of major events ready to book the ag event centre. That's important, Cutforth said, because the centre must be self-sustaining with no tax support for operations. He also said the building must be affordable for community groups such as the 4-H and the Broncs Rodeo Academy.

Cutforth also introduced key players in the project's development: project manager Duane Stretch, management consultant Gary Cooper, and Jennifer Heidt in administration.

The building could be ready for occupancy in time for the 75th anniversary Ponoka Stampede but more likely the first events will be held this fall.

"We know we have only once chance to do this right the first time," Cutforth said. "Nothing would be worse than not being ready for the users."



An update on construction of the main arena was presented by PAECS president Charlie Cutforth to community and business leaders last month. And there was a call for community and business level financial sponsorship to raise \$5 million to complete landscaping of the grounds and build a 200-stall barn. Left: As trusses are put in place, roofing follows. Tours were held for potential supporters. The project is a 75,000-square-foot ag event centre with an indoor arena with a dirt floor and 1,500 seats (expandable to 2,500), a banquet room, and lobby and concession areas. The outdoor components include two barns, stock pens, trailer and car parking, and RV camping.

Financial support categories

- Platinum level - \$500,000+
- Diamond level - \$250,000 to \$499,999
- Gold level - \$150,000 to \$249,999
- Silver level - \$100,000 to \$149,999
- Bronze level - \$50,000 to \$99,999

- Ruby level - under \$50,000
- Rancher - \$10,000
- Stable mate - \$2,000

For information on how you can support the project, contact Sherry Gummow at 403-783-0730

Ag event centre will improve Ponoka's quality of life

By George Brown

With an eye on the region's rich agricultural past, the Ponoka Ag Event Centre Society (PAECS) is stepping into the future.

A major fund raising campaign is underway to raise \$5 million locally to ensure the new ag event centre is fully functional when it opens for business later this year.

PAECS vice-president Sherry Gummow said supporting construction of the ag event centre is a good advertising tool for businesses in Ponoka and the region. "The centre will offer new facilities to groups throughout the province.

"We noted the need for the development of a year-round agriculture, recreation, special events and agricultural education centre to serve our community, the region and other participants from across Alberta and beyond," Gummow told the businesspeople. "Our project will be built remembering our strong agricultural history, while at the same time using the facilities to build for the future.

Businesses who support the project will present their message to a new market attracted to Ponoka and its services, Gummow said. "We believe that Ponoka is strategically located in the heart of the

oil and gas industry as well as traditional and alternative agricultural producers."

RC Strategies conducted a survey of potential users in central Alberta and found there is a growing demand for an indoor agricultural centre in the Ponoka area to host livestock shows and equine events, clinics and riding lessons, banquets and club meetings, rodeos.

Gummow said the ag event centre offers flexible space "to meet the widest range of user needs."

The ag event centre will add to a vibrant entertainment, recreation and cultural scene in Ponoka, she added, complementing municipal and private facilities such as the Ponoka Stampede Grounds, the arena and curling rink, swimming pool, tennis and racquet sports courts, bowling alley and cinema. "The ag event centre will round out what is already available to us."

Gummow said the centre will accommodate events such as:

- rodeos
- concerts and festivals
- team penning and sorting competitions
- horse and cattle show and sales
- barrel racing
- dressage and show jumping
- bullarama and rough stock competitions
- Broncs Rodeo Academy
- 4-H achievement day
- stock dog trials
- ag equipment and vehicle show
- trade shows

"The use of the facility is pretty limitless," she said.