

Prairieland Park opens doors to new sport

By Kayla Guerrette, Benchmark Public Relations



Every year approximately 3,600 organizations will do some sort of business with Prairieland Park. The non-profit organization has been in business for 135 years.

“It’s really quite amazing when you think of it,” said Mark Regier, CEO of Prairieland Parks. “It is older than the city of Saskatoon itself.”

The organization is made up of 240,000 square feet of trade space which is occupied year-round, with heavy demand in the spring and fall seasons with numerous

trade shows and conventions taking place.

“Our busiest months are definitely March and April,” said Regier. “We literally have to turn this building around overnight because one show is moving in and another is moving out.”

Regier said the organization’s crews are seen doing this at least eight times from January right up until the end of April.

Like many businesses, Prairieland Parks was greatly affected by the pandemic. Two hundred and fifty part-time employees were let go and they were unable to bring back their over 300 seasonal employees.

“It’s been devastating,” said Regier “Last year events like the Saskatoon EX were cancelled for the first time in our 134-year history. We were pretty much shut down from March of last year until now. Our trade and convention centre for the most part was dark.”

The organization also recently made the decision to no longer offer live thoroughbred horse racing. Something that was available in Saskatoon for over 50 years. Regier said it was not an easy decision but one that unfortunately had to be made.

“It’s heartbreaking,” said Regier. “We have put an extraordinary effort into sustaining live thoroughbred horse racing. We’ve tried to scratch out every possible revenue source and run it as lean as possible so that it’s financially viable.”

Regier said over the last five years it’s become increasingly difficult to keep the industry going and the pandemic has made things even more challenging for the organization to keep up with the horse racing industry. The organization was one of the last to have live thoroughbred horse racing in Canada.

“The industry really struggles,” he said. “It’s a very, very challenging business to run.”

So, when an investor approached Prairieland Park about the opportunity of potentially bringing a professional soccer team to the city, it felt like the right choice.

“This is a great opportunity,” said Regier. “We see this being very positive for Prairieland and for the city.”

There are over 8,000 children and 5,600 adults who play soccer in Saskatoon alone. The organization has been receiving a lot of positive feedback from the community.

“To be able to potentially provide an opportunity for future generations of kids to be able to play a sport they love on a professional level right here in Saskatoon is exciting,” said Regier.

Alan Simpson, President of Living Sky Sports & Entertainment (FSLE), is helping Prairieland Park bring professional soccer to the city. For Simpson, there was no question that the organization was the best place to have the stadium.

“Prairieland Park has an expertise in holding large events,” said Simpson “They have been doing this for a long time so all the pieces sort of fit and just seemed like a natural organization to approach.”

He also believes there is no better location. With 136 acres located only a five-minute drive from the downtown core of the city, it’s easy for people to get to the stadium 10-12 minutes from anywhere in the city.

It’s a great opportunity he said to bring the world’s largest game to the province. Like Regier, he believes it will give children growing up playing soccer a chance to be able to aspire to play a sport that they love on a professional level one day from their home province or city.

“The economic benefit is huge,” said Simpson “It would create various new jobs in the city. It would allow great visibility to the players and the sport. It’s a positive opportunity overall.”

But there is also the intangible benefit he said which is being able to bring together our cultural diversity in one place. Many countries around the world see soccer as the ultimate sport.

“When we made the announcement that of FSLE’s agreement with Prairieland Park and Canadian Premier League,” said Simpson “By the afternoon it was trending number seven Canada wide on Twitter. For a pro soccer team coming to Saskatoon, that’s pretty huge.”

Simpson and Regier hope to break ground in 2022 and have the stadium ready for the spring of 2023. But, with the unpredictable weather in the province, realistically this could mean professional soccer may actually only come to Saskatoon in 2024.

