

North Toronto Arena “Proud and Active” Supporter of Ice Sports for Community Girls & Boys, Board Chair Counters

November 12, 2009 (Toronto): In response to recent allegations of discriminatory practices in allocating ice time, the North Toronto Memorial Arena Board stated today that it is proud of the service it provides to the community and specifically to the boys and girls who live in it.

Arena Board Chair, Gordon Thompson, stated “contrary to the allegations being made, the Arena Board is confident it has complied with its mandate”. The Board is working with its community members, the North Toronto Hockey Association and the North Toronto Skating Club, in the process of growing girls’ ice sports programmes. Mr. Thompson added that the Board “has been working with City staff for many months to ensure there are policies in place to allow us to serve all members of the community in the best possible way”.

Currently, the North Toronto Memorial Arena has almost exclusively allocated its prime time ice to local organizations for community youth hockey, involving both boys and girls, and figure skating programs, which are dominated by young female skaters. In fact, more than 95% of prime time ice is currently used by community youth in North Toronto.

There are no men’s leagues and any so-called adult shinny hockey is only played in the late evening or early morning that is not suitable for youth community skating and hockey activities.

When asked, Mr. Thompson advised that “our Arena provides less than 30% of the ice required by the North Toronto Hockey Association, which it should be noted is open to and registers both boys and girls.” In fact, the vast majority of the North Toronto Hockey Association’s ice is secured from more expensive private sources. It is Mr. Thompson’s understanding that this year alone, the North Toronto Hockey Association, consisting of 1,200 community youth, most of whom reside in the North Toronto community, will spend more than \$500,000 for ice outside of the North Toronto Memorial Arena.

In addition, the North Toronto Hockey Association has been developing and growing girls’ hockey and, since the summer, has been planning to launch a girls Learn to Play Programme in January 2010. Additional girls’ hockey programmes will be introduced in the next full hockey season, at which time the Hockey Association will relocate some of its other activities to other arenas. The Arena Board believes this approach is consistent with the City’s recently announced policy for “equitable access to primetime ice “. This new policy, which the Arena Board received in summary form from the City in budget papers earlier this year, **allows Arena Boards a three year period to achieve equitable access**, commencing with the upcoming 2010-2011 hockey season. This three year period appears to have been overlooked by the Board’s critics.

“Interestingly, in addressing a girls’ hockey programme, we already identified it may negatively impact existing programmes at the Arena, because there simply isn’t enough

ice time” said Board member Janice Mitchell, “but we felt this type of programme is a priority for the community and we will ensure it happens.”

Thompson also noted that he has read the statements attributed to the Leaside Girls Association regarding their ice demand from the Board, and stated that it cannot accept the premise on which they are based. Indeed, their demand for 22 primetime hours from the North Toronto Memorial Arena would effectively force the Arena to cancel either the Hockey Association’s or the Skating Club’s programmes. Neither option is consistent with the Board’s and the City’s mandates.

“While it is unpleasant to be the focus of such allegations, the silver lining in this controversy is that it has highlighted the severe shortage of ice availability in our City and I encourage all City politicians to recognize the community demand for ice time and to find ways to make more ice available”. Thompson added “perhaps, when the construction of the Leaside Arena’s already approved second sheet of ice is completed, the Leaside Girls Association will find ice within that facility, which directly services their community.”

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