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Local contact pays a big dividend

\$200,000 naming rights deal hinges on local buy-in

THE SEEDS OF A SIX-FIGURE sponsorship deal can be sown at the local level. Just ask Doug Blakely, Advertising and Sponsorship Manager with Whitby, Ontario's Iroquois Park Sports Centre. Iroquois Park has just inked a five-year, \$200,000 naming rights agreement for its main spectator arena with partner Scotiabank. Spending of that scale has to be authorized by head office, but the key elements of the sale were negotiated between Blakely and Nick Toritto, Scotiabank's District Vice-President, GTA East. Once on board, it was Toritto who championed the project to Rick White, Vice President of Marketing, and John Doig, Senior Vice-President. It will be up to Toritto, and the four branches under his jurisdiction, to make this partnership come to life. And he says he's up to the challenge.

Iroquois Park's main spectator arena (arena I) had been unnamed since 2005, when the naming contract with Rogers expired and was not renewed. Blakely says it was in 2007 that Scotiabank surfaced as a legitimate prospect as it began its aggressive investment in hockey and showed an interest in building hockey-related relationships at the grassroots level as well.

It's a strategy that has been pushed down through Scotiabank's hierarchy. When Blakely first sat down with Toritto to discuss hockey-related opportunities at

Iroquois Park, Toritto was already on the same page. So were his branches, including the one right across the street from Iroquois Park. Toritto was not going to buy into a project without the support of his branch managers. He saw not only an opportunity to brand an arena, but a chance to work closely with the Town of Whitby (owner of Iroquois Park), deliver valuable programming to the community, and further deepen Scotiabank's relationship with grassroots hockey both in Whitby and in Durham Region.

The terms hammered out between Blakely and Toritto - \$209,250 over five years, plus approximately \$40,000 in production costs - were well outside his budget. "I can't write that cheque," says Toritto. But he became the project's champion within Scotiabank and was instrumental in pushing it through at a time when the economy was buckling at its knees.

"I made the pitch, along with our [branch] managers," says Toritto.

Blakely and Toritto agreed on a number of programs to reinforce Scotiabank's hockey connections. The naming was launched on Ontario's Family Day holiday, February 16, with a free skate, something that will be repeated annually as Scotiabank Family Day, where all ice activities at Iroquois Park will be free. Other elements include

titling of the Backyard Rink Program, which gives parents an opportunity to introduce children under 7 years to hockey or ringette. The program runs three times per week from October to March and will now be free. The Whitby Minor Hockey Development Program will be renamed Scotiabank Skills Scene. This element was added to the package in partnership with the Whitby Minor Hockey Association, which is Iroquois Park's largest user group. A portion of Scotiabank's rights fee will be paid to the association for its participation.

These are all elements that will have to be activated by the GTA East branches, says Toritto. Head office may provide them with the tools, but they are responsible for making it work.

"Without our commitment in GTA East, we couldn't pull this off," says Toritto.

Evaluation at the local level takes on a less formal flavour than at head office. For instance, Toritto refers to congratulations received from federal Cabinet member and local MP Jim Flaherty, and the warm reception from local politicians. He will look for more substantive opportunities to build business relationships with Iroquois Park patrons over the years, but for now, "nobody can accuse us of not being involved in the community."

The deal

Property: Iroquois Park Arena 1

Naming partner: Scotiabank

Term: Five years

Rights Fee: \$209,250

Benefits: Venue naming; free community access to selected programming, branded by Scotiabank; branded hockey skills development with local minor hockey association