

## **#6 “Been There – Have the T-Shirt”**

### **Presentation by Kelly Williams, Manager, Parks & Rec, Town of Petawawa**

#### **SUMMARY**

On Monday evening, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, Gayle Stewart (VP, WDRA) welcomed the approximately 20 attendees and introduced the guest speaker, Kelly Williams, a veteran of over 20 years in the business of recreation delivery, from small to large facilities and communities.

Drawing from his experience and recent completion of a Master Plan for the Town of Petawawa (16,000 residents) Kelly gave an excellent overview of the “do’s and do not’s” in assessing the delivery of, and strategic planning of, recreational services.

He began with the basics of Facility Management. Those who manage a facility need to understand the related costs and liabilities. Real or true costs of delivery need to be known, or how else can you set fees or plan for the future. There needs to be a business approach to the management; it’s all about dollars and cents (sense). Just as important, volunteer based management needs to be as knowledgeable and trained as if they were paid employees. They are just as liable. There are some 50 acts of legislation that affect the running of arenas, and the Ministry of Labour is one example where inspections are becoming more prevalent. Kelly recommends that someone in management needs to take a lead on this issue alone. Residents expect a sound and safe facility. The Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA) has an excellent website that offers extensive information.

With respect to strategic and long term planning, Kelly says “Plan the work and work the Plan”. He advises that we need to know what our situation is now. To obtain the users perspective, a public survey was very helpful in Petawawa (an exceptional 54% return). They also met with all user clubs to get their input on what works, and what doesn’t, to them. Kelly was impressed with our series of community open meetings which the WDRA and Ad Hoc Committee is using to build information. And it’s all available online for the community to see. When it comes to setting goals, those goals need to be achievable and measurable. And if a goal is not achieved, then it needs to be addressed.

Petawawa completed a Master Plan, an extensive and detailed look at the present and future. It took a year and professional support to produce. It is of course much more than the WDRA can do, but the process to understand the business and look to the future with regard to aging assets and programming, is quite similar. Kelly mentioned that over and above what we have done re Vision and Mission Statements, another very worthwhile exercise was to identify our Value System. It helped them to understand what was important to the volunteer management, and users, in the long run.

Operational budgeting is key to success. Again, good record keeping and inventory management helps management project reasonable revenues and costs out 1 to 5 years. “If you can’t measure it – you can’t manage it!” We also need to understand true costs vs subsidized costs, again to be able to better predict. Kelly advised working with user groups would help us better understand each other’s business and challenges. For example, a hockey scheduler has a very difficult job. How are all parties affected?

A big part of the planning process is understanding recreational trends, now and in the future. Information and data with regard to trends in aging population, economy, technology, family dynamics (eg. single parents), volunteerism, healthy lifestyles – all help us plan for the future. Some trends evident elsewhere include “active transportation”; that is a move toward walking or bicycling rather than driving. From a more recreational standpoint, some sports which are “free play” are becoming more popular with the young, when they can do it on their own time, with no structure and at all skill levels.

As with many aging facilities across Ontario, management requires funding to upgrade or replace assets. That funding comes in various ways; fundraising events, grants, taxes, and loans. As we’ve heard in other presentations, The Ontario Trillium Foundation has grant funds available for those who best show need in building relationships to improve the health and wellness of residents.

In summary, Kelly provided some tips and tricks to help us in our planning process.

- Know that government agendas are about accessibility, health, decaying infrastructure, aging population.
- Know your grant agency contacts and meet personally
- Business success is about business relationships
- Think outside the box – be creative.
- Leadership is critical.
- Know your limitations (time, volunteers, funding) – don’t promise what you cannot deliver.
- Know your business. Manage your risks. Be prepared to defend your position.

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