

Vancouver's shining

Waiting for the benefits

By Whitney Carnahan



Photo courtesy of Ideal Canopy Tent & Structure

Ideal Canopy Tent & Structure, Delta, British Columbia, Canada, created two 90-ft.-by-33-ft. engineered custom canopies and 16 full graphic marquees for the British Columbia Pavilion at Robson Square in downtown Vancouver for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in February. The initial consultation with the government was in June 2009.

"During the process, we faced many obstacles including material substitutions, engineering and permitting," says Raj Pooni, Ideal's senior sales and marketing consultant.

"Many redesigns, drafts and engineering efforts were required to successfully certify the canopy. Permits required several clarifications and we also had to get approval from certified structural and architectural engineers. Because of bus lines, no cranes were allowed. As a result, we had to use scaffolding, which required more labor," she says.

"Teamwork also was very important in this project. To coordinate times between professionals and get the project done in the timeframe we were allowed was amazing. There was a lot of unexpected red tape with this project which in return required money, money and more money. The biggest lesson learned is to quote right," she says. ♦

In February, the eyes of the world focused on Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, as the city and country hosted the world and its best athletes for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Cities across the globe compete for the honor in hopes of showing everyone what they can offer as a destination for new residents, tourists, business meetings and conventions.

"Vancouver held a hugely successful Olympics during the biggest recession in a lifetime. Various levels of government invested in infrastructure, but I think the real story is our people. The Games brought optimism and served to unite Canadians during difficult times," says Chris Fellbaum, president and CEO, Lonsdale Event Rentals, North Vancouver.

"After Team Canada won the gold medal in hockey, people from all over the world joined Canadians to celebrate, whether it was walking around downtown Vancouver high-fiving total strangers or singing 'O Canada' at the top of their lungs in restaurants and bars. It was unreal," he says.

Once over, however, the immediate impact of the Olympics isn't quite what some may have hoped for. While the 2010 Winter Olympic Games brought visibility, it hasn't necessarily translated into boom times for conventions and events, at least not yet, and with Olympics-related construction complete, equipment rental revenue growth has slowed.

"Vancouver's construction industry was a prime beneficiary of the Olympic Games and it is particularly unfortunate that they ended as the recession came on," says Scott Hazelton, director, business planning solutions, IHS Global Insight, Lexington, Mass., the respected economic forecasting company that compiles data for the American Rental Association's (ARA) *State of the Equipment Rental Industry Outlook* Market Monitor service.

As a result, Hazelton says construction spending in British Columbia has tumbled. While there has been some recovery in 2010, IHS Global Insight is forecasting British Columbia's construction growth to be 1 percent in 2010 compared to 4 percent nationally.

The next step for Vancouver is the realization of a hoped-for side effect of hosting the Olympics — increased tourism. "Post-Games, the reality of the worldwide economic situation has definitely affected event spending both at a corporate level as well as more local level where arts, festivals and sporting events rely on corporate and government financial support to succeed," says Noah Russell, owner, Apex Tent & Event Rentals, Vancouver.

"Vancouver has not seen much of the expected benefit of the Olympic marketing in terms of international visitors or destination events for 2010, likely due to the fact that so much of the U.S. market is still struggling. Our new convention center and hotels are all working below capacity. However, the general feeling seems to be more positive for spring 2011 and beyond," Russell says.



Photo courtesy of Ideal Canopy Tent & Structure

Olympic moment

"The Winter Olympics allowed Canada to stand on the world stage for 16 days to celebrate all that makes Canada a great place to live, work and play," says Dennis Heathcote, owner, D & K Imports, Mississauga, Ontario. "We are now starting to see a dramatic increase in business throughout the province of British Columbia as a result of the hoped-for increase in tourism and conventions."

"The Olympics was a great jewel and every penny was well spent," says Rhonda Pederson, vice president, Pedersen's Rentals and Sales in Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver, and ARA's Region 10 director.

However, she says any bump in business from the exposure has yet to materialize. "Our economy is not that great right now and we are all fighting tooth and nail for local business. We are seeing conventions coming here that never came here before and things are happening that would not have happened because of the Olympics, but tourism is down because the U.S. dollar is about at par with the Canadian dollar. When things come back, we'll be in the right position," she says.

Fellbaum says Lonsdale Event Rentals invested strategically and significantly into specific infrastructure and inventory prior to the Games and he remains confident that the moves will pay off.

"I don't know anyone who was able to retire immediately following the Olympics, but it certainly was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our business. We're in the event rental industry, but our real strength is in creating genuine, sustainable relationships with our customers. We've been able to build upon those relationships following the Games. In February 2010, the world saw Vancouver shine. If that translates into more event planners hosting more events in our beautiful city, our entire industry is better off," he says.

For some, the impact of hosting the Games is that it showed the gregarious nature of a country and its people who may at times be misunderstood.

"The Vancouver Olympics showed a very different side of Canada," says Brian Spilak, president and CEO, Texada Software, Guelph, Ontario. "It showed that we as a country took the Games very seriously. For example, the 'Own the

Podium Campaign — Most Gold medals by Host Country,' but without taking ourselves too seriously by having a clown light the torch at the closing ceremony after the botched opening ceremony lighting. It showed Canada was a very confident and proud country, which was a side of Canada many people hadn't seen before. We are proud of the show we put on and it definitely cast us in a new and improved light on the world stage."

Michael Saunders, president, Xgensoft, Newmarket, Ontario, agrees. "The Olympics as a worldwide event definitely created visibility and an ambience for Canada," he says. "The Olympics shines a spotlight on every host country and gives that country a chance to showcase and share its culture and the spirit of the country. The extensive media coverage that we have now provides" the opportunity for the whole world to participate and share in the thrill. What

better way is there to create visibility for your country, share your culture and promote the image that you would like to foster in the world."

Russell says the Olympics also provided Apex Tents with an opportunity to showcase products and services not normally used. "Long-term, the Olympics will have a lasting benefit for most event-related services within the greater Vancouver area," he says.

He says another potential side benefit, particularly for the party and event segment, is the exposure of the industry to potential future employees.

"A number of local people were involved in the larger event industry as hosts, servers and laborers. Many of these individuals now have interest in pursuing careers in some facet of the event industry. That makes hiring easier with more applicants having some level of experience," Russell says. ♦



Photo courtesy of Ideal Canopy Tent & Structure

The British Columbia Lottery Corp. Winter Games Domes, created by Ideal Canopy Tent & Structure, Delta, British Columbia, Canada, were designed to give the public the opportunity to experience the 2010 Winter Games from the athlete's perspective. The Winter Games Domes visited 13 communities from May to September 2009. They also were exhibited throughout the games at the Richmond Oval.

"The custom-built 30-ft. diameter domes with full graphics were designed and fabricated over a period of five months. Our dome tent technology was designed specifically for the range of unique challenges encompassed in the BCLC 2010 Winter Games Dome Project," says Raj Pooni, Ideal's senior sales and marketing consultant.

"The four tents included in the touring project needed to be lightweight for transport and had to be set up in as little as six hours by the crew. In addition to weight and setup/strike requirements, the tents needed to be fitted with a number of bracketing and truss systems to allow for the A/V components to be supported by the tent structure," she says.

"There were so many people involved and each and every one of them needed to sign off on the project, including getting athletes' approvals to have their pictures on the tent walls," she says. ♦