

In the early 1990s, Lloyd Gable and Dr. Howard Rees had a vision for the town of Blenheim. They both saw a need for enhanced recreational and community facilities for the town of 4,000. They set their sights on the town's aging outdoor pool, and came up with a plan for enclosing the pool and developing community space in one building.

With the backing of the Blenheim Rotary Club, the two gentlemen led a very successful campaign. Community support for the project was steady – no one questioned the need for a facility that families could use year-round. Various groups were excited about the possibilities: young swimmers were anxious to start their own swim team, seniors were looking forward to the fitness opportunities, and youth were interested in upgrading their life-saving skills.

In February, 1997, the people of this community south of Chatham were able to see the results of their fundraising efforts. The facility quickly became a big part of peoples' lives here – it enhanced the programs offered at the neighbouring arena, and was within walking distance of three elementary schools, the local high school and the seniors' center. Within a month of opening, the Blenheim Foxtales Swim Club was having regular practices, and the meeting room upstairs was being used for evening classes, birthday parties and social events.



The enclosure was not perfect: it was barely wheelchair accessible, the change facilities were minimal and access to the pool deck was limited. An elevator could be used to access the upper meeting rooms, but not the lower ones. But the intent had always been to continue fundraising and to proceed with Phase 2 of the project as money became available.

In 1998, municipal restructuring put those plans on the back burner. During the course of amalgamation, the newly-formed Municipality of Chatham-Kent assumed control of the facility, and capital projects were put on hold.

This spring, the Council of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent and the Gable Rees Rotary Pool Fundraising Committee agreed that the time has come to move forward and finish the recreational complex. The \$1.2 million project calls for improvements to the main entrance of the building, the change rooms and the washrooms. An elevator will make the entire building wheelchair accessible. There will be enhanced meeting facilities in the lower level of the building which will address the complete lack of meeting facilities in Blenheim.

The changes will also incorporate meeting and storage rooms for the Blenheim Cubs and Scouts, and provide space on deck for the Blenheim Blast Swim Team.

The Gable Rees Rotary Pool draws in people from across Chatham-Kent. Seniors programming is a priority, with 20 hours set aside for adult lane swims, senior open swims and aquafit each week. Youth and child programming includes lessons, open swims, tot and parent swims, after school sessions, junior masters, and NLS programs. The pool is the home base of the Blenheim Blast Swim Team, and is also used by a Masters Club and the Chatham 'Y' Pool Sharks.

The Gable Rees Rotary Pool has, for 10 years, provided the people of south Kent with opportunities to enhance their physical fitness, to take part in social events, and to embrace life-long learning. Very few small, rural communities can even dream of such opportunities.