



Prairie ice, curling whimsies and tax dreams

by Catherine Morrison

One of the fun things about doing this column is how an innocent-looking notice of purchase can trigger a voyage of wacky and wonderful discovery. Here's an unexpected gem I happened upon in pursuing a lead from *Summit's* editor, Anne Phillips.

According to a notice a few months ago on the Municipal Information Network, the City of Weyburn, Saskatchewan, is looking for a supplier to replace the ice slab in its 40-year-old Colloseum building, the local arena and ice-rink.

An ice-slab? I can hear you asking. Well, wait a minute. It gets better. The centre is *also* tendering for a 4,000 square foot addition, ice plant relocation, dasher board replacement (dasher board?) and related seating, mechanical and electrical improvements.

Those ultra-sophisticated urbanites among you may be stifling a polite yawn at this point but, if you grew up on the Prairies, you know how vital the community arena is to life in a Prairie town. Second only, I'd hazard a guess, to the historic and inevitable town preoccupation with – curling!

That's where the fun part comes in. In checking out Weyburn's website (www.city.weyburn.sk.ca), I discovered that the city is home to the Turner Curling Museum. Now, I'll admit I am taking a liberty here – stretching, perhaps, my mandate to cover interesting public sector purchases. Oh well, the Turner Curling Museum is worth it.

The Turner collection began almost 30 years ago, when Don and Elva Turner, avid Prairie curlers, found themselves beginning to accumulate a growing number of curling pins – little lapel buttons worn by curlers that distinguish a curling club, or maybe a special bonspiel. There are now over 18,000 curling buttons in the Turner collection.

Also in the collection, which according to the City of Weyburn website is thought to be the largest collection of curling memorabilia in the world, is a rare set of circular curling "rocks" with iron handles, forged from cannonballs as a novelty for use in the Ottawa Valley, circa 1800. The largest item is a rock sharpener (owned by the Queen City Curling Stone Co. of Regina from the 1930s to the 1950s), used to plane the bottom of a granite curling rock so it will curl in or out (to one side or the other of the ice sheet, for the uninitiated).

There's a collection of historic corn brooms too, artifacts now gone the way of the dodo bird. If you've seen the funny Canadian curling movie, *Men with Brooms*, you may remember the fuss made about the traditional use of corn brooms to sweep the ice, warming it up to facilitate the speed and curl of the rock. The characteristic thwack of the broom and heart-attack-in-the-making sweeping technique of the good old days has been replaced by an effete-looking push-broom technique that robs the game of much of its drama.

Don Turner is particularly proud of a pair of rocks from the first Macdonald Briar in 1926. The Briar, now – a sign of the times – "the Nokia Briar," sniffs Turner somewhat disdainfully, is Canada's premier curling event. In 1926, teams had to take their own rocks to the Briar.

The ones in the Turner collection were used that year by the team from Yellowgrass, Saskatchewan.

When the Turners' collection outgrew their basement in 1990, the City of Weyburn gave it a permanent home – a 2,660 square foot city-owned building that is actually climate controlled, as any serious museum must be.

But getting back to the serious business of public sector purchasing, here's a sober and true-to-the-mandate-of-this-column story about a service acquisition on the part of the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE), an independent advisory body, with members appointed by the Prime Minister. The job of NRTEE (www.nrtee-trnee.ca) is to provide decision makers, opinion leaders and the Canadian public with advice and recommendations for balancing economic prosperity with environmental preservation.

NRTEE recently posted a notice inviting expressions of interest from energy policy consultants with the capacity to do a study of how Canada's tax system could be put to use in the "de-carbonization" of Canadian energy systems. In other words, to figure out ways, like tax incentives – possibly even disincentives – to encourage a shift from the use of fossil fuels to more environmentally friendly fuels, such as solar power.

According to Alex Hunter, manager of NRTEE's Ecological Fiscal Reform program, this is a new direction for the organization, which does not have, at this point, "a lot of knowledge about influencing the economy and environment nexus."

"For this exercise, we're looking for people who are a little more knowledgeable about how the private sector works," says Hunter, "as opposed to those who know how government works."

With this "expression of interest," NRTEE is also embarking on a new direction in contracting. As a contracting-intensive organization, NRTEE has recently been involved in discussions with Treasury Board Secretariat to find out how to get its contracting house in order. This "expression of interest" is the first time for NRTEE under new contracting rules and "a first foray" into the use of a national electronic tendering service. ♫

Catherine Morrison, a writer based in Chelsea, Quebec, has been published in the Ottawa Citizen and the Globe and Mail's print and online editions, as well as in Canadian Consumer, Asia Pacific Magazine, the Edmonton Journal and C.A.R.P. Magazine. She was a full-time writer/broadcaster for CBC Network Television and CBC TV and Radio, Winnipeg and a contributing editor and columnist for Winnipeg Magazine.

If you know of unusual and interesting public sector purchases, either by the nature of the good or the nature of the purchase, please contact us at: (800) 575-1146, fax us at: (613) 688-0767, or email: info@summitconnects.com

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