

## Toronto gets glitzy theme centre, not Games

BY JAMES CHRISTIE, TORONTO

The Olympic Spirit is coming to Toronto after all, enclosed in a \$32-million showcase building scheduled to open in 2003.

Plans were unveiled yesterday for the glitzy, high-tech entertainment complex of interactive sport displays, virtual-reality shows, Olympic history, gift shop and restaurant, all meant to inspire 550,000 visitors a year to buy into the Olympic dream — or at least

buy something. There will be a soft sell of the Olympic values, but it will take cold, hard cash to get in: \$18 for a ticket that includes all the attractions spread over 50,000 square feet at the corner of Yonge and Dundas streets.

International Olympic Committee marketing manager David Aikman said the Olympic Spirit Centre was not some kind of consolation prize for Toronto losing out to Beijing in the race for the 2008 Summer Olympics. It was a business

decision based on where to launch the first of several galleries intended to exploit the Olympic theme around the world. Toronto's bidders for the 2008 Games obviously succeeded in making the impression that it is a multicultural market ready for harvest.

"This was not like a competition for the Games," Aikman said. The right partners, right location and right timing came together in Toronto. He added that if Toronto decided to try for the Games again,

"any demonstration of a city's enthusiasm for the ideals of the Games can't hurt."

A pilot project for the Olympic Spirit Centre was successful in Munich, and Vienna and Athens were also considered for the first full-scale project.

A portion of the proceeds will be shared by the IOC and the Canadian Olympic Association. COA president Mike Chambers said the money will be put into services for coaches and athletes, but it won't

arrive soon enough to help the 2004 Athens Games team.

Chambers could not say how much money would accrue to the COA and IOC, but it will be "significant." Glenn Miller, president of the project developer PenEquity Management Corporation, in a lighthearted attempt at humour said, "far too much will go to the IOC and COA and not be in the hands of the private sector."

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## Private interests key to project

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The Olympic Spirit Centre is not directly an IOC project. It's put together under licence by private interests known as the Olympic Spirit Group. The building will be part of Toronto's downtown regeneration development by PenEquity.

"Olympic Spirit is the closest you can get if you never have the chance to go to the Games," said Markus Jerger, CEO of the International Spirit Development Organization.

Landmark Entertainment Group, creators of attractions such as Terminator 2/3D for Universal Studios in Florida, and Star Trek: The Experience for Paramount Parks and the Hilton in Las Vegas, will design the attractions.

"It's not a museum. It's also not a theme park," said Gary Goddard, Landmark's chairman and co-founder. He said he wanted an "immersive experience of ideals and triumphs and tragedies of the Olympics."

Other partners involved are Toros Entertainment and its general manager Bobby Sniderman, the son of Sam (The Record Man) Sniderman, whose flagship store is in the neighbourhood.

About 60 per cent of the Olympic Spirit Centre displays will represent international Olympic stories, and 40 per cent will have a Canadian focus.

Note: Chambers said the COA's search for a new chief executive officer continues, and that the organization receives applications from good candidates "every week." "We're looking for a candidate who wants the job; [the job] fits with their career, and [someone] who's happy with the compensation." Translation: the \$150,000 to \$175,000 the COA can afford might lure a wannabe but won't buy an established CEO. News reports last week put a Toronto-based CEO's average salary at about \$290,000. "When you can't write a blank cheque, it limits you at any level," Chambers said.