

Burnaby Fire Fighters Hold Torch for World Police & Fire Games

It was a vision that grew from friendly banter between a few fire fighters during the 2001 World Police & Fire Games (WPFG) in Indianapolis, Indiana. The experience at these Games had lit a fire under Burnaby Local 323 Secretary Miles Ritchie and Local 323 member Jeff Clark, who quickly set a goal to bring the WPFG to British Columbia in 2009.

“Where else can you ski, water ski and golf all in the same afternoon?” they both ask.

IAFF members have attended the Games since 1985. “We attended our first Games in 1995 in Melbourne, Australia,” says Ritchie. He and Clark wanted other fire fighters in the province and across Canada who might not have the financial means or time away from their families to be able to experience the camaraderie, sportsmanship and the opportunity to make lifelong friendships at this international event.

The duo submitted a bid to host the Games with a \$5,000 deposit to the WPFG Federation on the Friday before the closing deadline and, to their great surprise, were told that it was the only bid for the 2009 Games.

The bid process required a proposal outlining what the bid state/province could and would do as the host, followed by three days of venue tours and a day of pitches from leaders and other stakeholders throughout British Columbia.

“We approached Burnaby’s deputy city manager, and together we went to Mayor Derek Corrigan who agreed to front us the cash for our bid presentation,” says Ritchie. “We did this knowing that if we lost our bid presentation, the Federation could still open it up to other bidders.”

The Federation had agreed to allow them to conduct the bid presentation at home instead of in Barcelona, Spain, in the summer of 2003. “This trip would have cost us more than \$250,000, but we were able to do the bid for the small sum of \$87,000,” Clark says.

During the first night of the presentation, Mayor Derek Corrigan pulled Ritchie and Clark aside and announced he would fund an additional \$1.5 million in cash, plus all in-kind services. On the final day, the WPFG Federation remarked that it had never seen a better presentation, which included speeches from Burnaby Mayor Corrigan, Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell (now a senator), British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell and John Furlong, CEO of the 2010 Winter Olympics, as well as Ritchie and Clark.

Another surprise came when Premier



Campbell announced he would match Burnaby’s \$1.5 million. “We used a lot of political clout that we had built over the years with municipal and provincial leaders,” Ritchie notes. “In less than four days, we had \$3 million in cash and were off and running! We thought that was pretty good for a couple of fire fighters.”

IAFF 6th District Vice President Lorne West remarks, “Burnaby Local 323 and specifically Miles Ritchie and Jeff Clark are responsible for the successful bid to host the Games.”



Team British Columbia won the silver medal in flag football in Indianapolis and a bronze medal in Quebec City.

Following the bid presentation, the British Columbia 2009 WPFG Board immediately went to work promoting the Games at the WPFG in Barcelona in 2003, Quebec City in 2005 and Adelaide, Australia, in 2007. “We hired our first paid employee in February 2007,” says Clark. A few months later, the city of Vancouver came on board and hired two sports managers — Adam Ryan and Mike Canaday, both members of Vancouver Local 18.

“It has been a bumpy ride at times,” admits Ritchie. “Our once-in-a-lifetime experience has taken a few unexpected turns.”

To date, 9,200 athletes have registered to compete in 63 sports at 40 venues across British Columbia. Burnaby Local 323 was awarded to host the beer gardens and serve food and refreshments. Clark and Ritchie both agree: “We are looking forward to

raising some cold bevs with friends, as well as funds for our charitable society which donates to more than 40 charities in the lower mainland.”

None of this would have become a reality without the support of numerous IAFF and fire service leaders and members, including then-6th District Vice President Terry A. Ritchie, Burnaby Fire Chief John Stewart, Burnaby fire fighter and WPFG Federation Director Dave Kent (also director of the 1989 Games in Vancouver), retired Vancouver Local 18 captain and a director of the 1989 and 2009 WPFG Games Mike Gilmore and current 6th District Vice President Lorne West (also a director for the 1989 Games and presenter of the water skiing/wakeboard venue during the bid process).

Their continual support and insight has been incredible, say Clark and Ritchie. “We also made some valuable friendships in 2003 with fellow fire fighters in Adelaide and need to thank South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service fire fighters Neil Manglesdorf, Anthony Keain, Bill Jamieson, Darren Scott, Mark Haylock and Fire Chief Grant Lupton for their perspective of the WPFG and retrospect.”

In addition, IAFF General President Harold Schaitberger, the British Columbia Professional Fire Fighters Association (BCPFFA), Assistant to the General President Jim Lee and the IAFF Canadian office assisted and supported the efforts to bring the WPFG to British Columbia.

“We hope we have the opportunity to see General President Schaitberger at our opening ceremonies this summer,” say Clark and Ritchie.

They both add that, in these turbulent economic times, these Games will bring more than \$50 million to the local economy.

Clark and Ritchie also wish their brothers and sisters in New York all the best in 2011, as well as good luck to the 2015 bidders in Toronto, Ontario; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Fairfax, Virginia. And special thanks to Burnaby Local 323 members and President Michael Hurley and Burnaby’s fire chiefs for their continued help and support.

Held biennially, the Games are open to all full-time or retired professional fire fighters, law enforcement, and customs and correctional officers from around the world. The size and scope of the Games continue to grow, with both the attendance and number of participating countries steadily increasing.

The Games will be held in New York City in 2011.

For more information, visit www.2009wpfg.ca. ■