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The aesthetic experience at the Richmond Olympic Oval: “it’s the wood”

For immediate release

It’s been said that one of the greatest legacies of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games will be an increased awareness of “sustainable living” – after all, the Olympics embraced “going green” in many ways, including green principles and practices in operations and events and by building sustainable venues.

“There’s no doubt that the Olympics have taken the wood culture in BC to the next level,” states Mary Tracey, executive director of Wood *WORKS!* BC. “We’ve noted an increased awareness of wood as a natural, sustainable and renewable building material. Athletes and visitors alike have experienced the intangible – the positive environments in the Olympic venues where wood is showcased as a primary building material,” she explains.

The international-award winning Richmond Olympic Oval is often referred to as the crown jewel of all the Olympic venues. Designed to accommodate the long-track speed-skating events before an audience of more than 6,000 spectators, it’s the largest structure built for the 2010 Winter Olympics. It features one of the most unique applications of wood systems and most innovative uses of wood with its expansive six-acre free spanning ‘wood wave’ roof, with a content of BC’s “beetle kill” wood.

The \$178-million Oval has been getting gold medal reviews from Olympic athletes who have competed at the facility. 29-year-old Dmitry Lobkov from Russia, a former silver medalist who finished 8th in the men’s 500 m speed-skating was clearly impressed, “It’s a beautiful course. This place, I really like it. I don’t know why, but everybody feels like this. It’s a good place for training with a good atmosphere.”

One of Canada’s gold medalists, Christine Nesbitt was effusive in her praise just after she saw the Oval for the first time. “I love it, it is the most beautiful – hands down, it is the most beautiful oval in the world. I really like skating on it. There is nothing like this.”

Clara Hughes, the six-time Canadian Olympic medallist who claimed a bronze in the women’s 5,000-metre speed-skating race on Wednesday – the final race of her Olympic career – speaks volumes about her experience speed-skating at the Oval. “For me, there was an instant connection with the building,” she says. “It’s an incredible building; the aesthetics are beautiful and you can tell a lot of care and thought went into it. It’s a building every Canadian can be proud of.”

24-year-old Team Canada speed-skater Kyle Parrott agrees, “It’s (usually) steel and concrete in the whole building so it’s really cool to have a wood roof. It’s more of a natural feel. It’s a little more welcoming, I think.”

“Those kinds of reviews are delightful to hear, especially for all of us who worked on the project from the ground up for more than four years,” explains Mary Tracey. “The Olympic Oval lifts the human spirit – instead of the standard bunker, it’s a meaningful design and a warm, inviting place where you want to linger. What defines the experience? It’s the wood.” Ms. Tracey was among a group of architects, planners, engineers and

BC mayors who were presented with awards this week for their work in and support of wood design and construction in BC, especially as it relates to Olympic venues. Ms. Tracey and her team of technical advisors at Wood *WORKS!* BC were asked by the provincial government to provide technical support and wood expertise on the Olympic Oval and other Olympic venues, interacting and working with design and building professionals.

Marion LaRue of Cannon Design Architecture Inc. was the senior project manager of the design team of 25 architects and 22 consultants responsible for the Oval. "There are so many positives for athletes competing at the Olympic Oval -- the natural light, the setting, and of course the wood. We know that natural materials like wood create spaces that influence the psychology of people – for instance with healing in a health care setting. It makes sense that the natural materials and the connection to the natural world at the Oval create a space that is a positive environment for competition."

The Press Attache for Canadian long -track speed-skating agrees, "The athletes love this beautiful building – and the setting is phenomenal," explains Antonio Faiola. "When you enjoy going to the rink it gets you in the mindset to perform at your optimal level."

The Olympic Oval and other Olympic venues have set the bar high for the future of building and design of public buildings in the province. With continued advancements in wood engineering and prefabrication capabilities, can we look forward to more innovative buildings in our communities?

Gerry Epp, a principal of Fast and Epp Structural Engineers, designed the roof of the Richmond Oval-- a precedent setting example of BC's and Canada's advanced wood engineering and prefabrication capabilities. "We've spanned this enormous distance with panels using ordinary two-by-fours, the same kind you can find in every house in Canada. We couldn't have designed or built this even 10 years ago," he states.

While the scale of the Olympic Oval is not likely to be replicated in any other BC community, there is hope that it will inspire many smaller versions in BC communities in the future. With the passage of the new Wood First Act in BC, which requires publicly-funded buildings to maximize the use of wood content, Wood *WORKS!* BC has been asked to help local governments navigate their way through the "build with wood" requirements on publicly-funded projects. For the past 11 years, Wood *WORKS!* BC has worked extensively with municipalities on smaller community projects ranging from firehalls to libraries; from pools to ice arenas and recreation centres.

"Wood *WORKS!* BC is proud to help lead the way to innovative and creative uses of natural, beautiful, sustainable and renewable wood in design and construction. We look forward to working together to make "wood first" in BC, across Canada, and around the world," concludes Ms. Tracey.

Wood WORKS! is a national industry-led initiative of the Canadian Wood Council, with a goal to support innovation and provide leadership on the use of wood and wood products. Through workshops, seminars and case studies, Wood WORKS! BC provides education, training and technical expertise to building and design professionals involved with commercial, institutional and industrial construction projects throughout BC.