

The Sponsorship REPORT

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Peterborough's invisible naming partner

One of the city of Peterborough's most prominent law firms has acquired naming rights to a new downtown civic square, except it has no intention of naming the space. Instead, it intends to give it away.

LLF Square was never on the table, says Bill Lockington, Senior Partner of LLF Lawyers, a regional law firm and the largest in the city.

That sits well with Peterborough's Sponsorship Coordinator Scott Elliott. He's only a year into his role, and the city of 80,000 an hour north-east of Toronto is still finding its feet when it comes to corporate partnerships. The partnership with LLF will serve as a gentle introduction to councillors and residents - Elliott calls it baby steps between philanthropy and sponsorship - though it may also set unfair expectations of what corporate sponsorship entails.



The city also made it easy by low-balling the rights fee: \$100,000 over 20 years, with \$20,000 up front to cover the acquisition of a piece of public art and the balance divided into equal annual increments over the remainder of the contract. Elliott defends the fee:

"It's not going to be a heavily-trafficked place," says Elliott. The new civic space will be adjacent to the Raymond Moriyama-designed public library, which is in the final stages of a \$12 million expansion and retrofit. The city will make use of it in civic programming, but it's not intended as a destination in the same way as an arena or a theatre, he says.

LLF won't be ignored in the square. There will be some form of acknowledgment of its contribution. But, as Lockington explains, the firm's offices are across the street. There's no need to overwhelm residents with something over the top.

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Over the past 20 years restrictions on law firm advertising in Ontario have been relaxed considerably. Lockington laughs while comparing the old restrictions with today's "free for all" environment. Within that environment, LLF is comfortable remaining "a quiet player," says Lockington, sponsoring properties in the local arts, culture and education communities, remaining a visible and valued corporate citizen but never, ever, beating its breast.

Peterborough has a corporate sponsorship policy and there is nothing in that policy that would have prevented LLF from taking the square's name.

Lockington says he made it clear to Elliott early in the discussions that, "we didn't want the square named after our firm." He's even uncomfortable with the term naming rights. "We have an interest in sponsoring community projects," he explains, rhyming off a long list of community organizations that have benefited from LLF's support. This one would have been difficult for LLF to ignore, being across the street and integral to neighbourhood redevelopment. "Being a partner with the city is what's really important to us."

The announcement of the corporate naming of a public asset is always met with plenty of public pushback. LLF will avoid this. In fact, it's pretty well assured that LLF will earn a great deal of public goodwill for its decision abdicate naming and turn it over to the community.

The selection of the name will be a public process, but one that won't risk a repeat of the UK's Boaty McBoatface experience. The city and LLF are narrowing down a long list from internal consultations and suggestions. A short list that meets both the city's and LLF's approval will be put to the public for final selection, says Lockington.

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