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## Fort Chip cheers arena's reopening

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Today staff

Four years and \$16 million later, Fort Chipewyan has a brand-new Archie Simpson Arena.

After the original building's roof collapsed in 2005, Wood Buffalo municipal council approved the construction of a new arena for the community of close to 1,000 people, and yesterday was the official opening of the 4,500-square-metre facility. The event featured speeches from local chiefs, Syncrude Canada president and CEO Tom Katinas, Wood Buffalo mayor and council and Lindsay Blackett, minister of culture and community spirit.

The building was filled with people and many excited children during the ceremony.

"Fort Chip is one of our oldest communities. It's a native community and, like many of them, there are challenges (like) a lot younger population than other communities," said Blackett, explaining the importance of the facility. "When you don't have a community facility, a sports facility, what are the young people going to do? This is good not just for fitness and education and leadership skills, but encouraging them to keep active and in a positive fashion."

The new Archie Simpson Arena features an ice surface, computer lab, a fitness centre, a youth area with games like pool and foosball, a basketball court and a playground. Children ran all over the playground during the ceremony, and several games of basketball were played.

"Life in politics is not a bowl of cherries but you always want to know you're doing something for the betterment of the community and the betterment of people," said Blackett. "It's great to see I don't really think of this as work."

The bulk of the funding for the project came from the municipality, while \$1 million came from the provincial government and \$500,000 from Syncrude. When Katinas spoke he described the building as a magical place and pointed out how wonderful it was to see children enjoying the new facility so much.

"We have politicians, the mayor her worship Melissa Blake, her city council, provincial government, band chiefs and people from industry. We're all in one room and we're all smiling. We're all happy. That's pure magic -- you can't buy that."

The chiefs in the area also said they were very happy with the new facility but wish that it had been built sooner.

Roxanne Marcel, chief of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, said the youth will definitely enjoy the new arena if the kids using the playground were any indication.

"We like the facility. It's done, it's complete. Our only concern was it took four years to complete. We're happy with what we have. It's here for the youth this is where the youth are going to build there self respect and esteem," said Marcel.

One new feature of the facility is that it will include synthetic ice, which will allow skating year-round at a much cheaper cost than traditional ice.

"It's an awesome facility. It's a long time waiting for this sort of atmosphere for the community and the kids especially," said Chief Allan Adam of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. "It will be used by all groups, and the young and guys my age and maybe even the elders if they're willing to come out and participate."

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