

The pitchman

Fred MacGillivray is helping Halifax establish a beachhead in the fiercely competitive international market for meetings and marquee events



Never give up: Losing the bid for the 2010 Commonwealth Games only fuelled Fred MacGillivray's ambitions for new infrastructure.

"Within 15 years, Halifax will be the most sought-after event destination in North America," says Fred MacGillivray, the CEO of Trade Centre Ltd., which manages Halifax's World Trade and Convention Centre. In support of such an ambitious goal, MacGillivray can list the province's advantages with such comprehensive and unambiguous relish that you begin to wonder if an acre lacking an asset exists anywhere. It's a practiced litany, no doubt, but a sincere and effective one for a man dedicated to the growth of Halifax as a destination for special events.

The job of pitching Halifax and Nova Scotia as a great place to visit may not

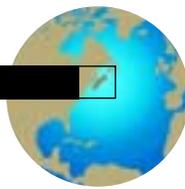
seem daunting, but the task of convincing major event planners to set their stage here entails challenges not limited to tourism. In order to host trade shows, conventions, and sporting and entertainment events, a place must have more than friendly people and historic and natural character.

Halifax already has proven itself capable of hosting major events. The 1995 Halifax G7 Economic Summit was a watershed moment. "There was no question in my mind, once I saw the execution of that event and the level we were able to take it to, as well as the huge organization that went into making it a success," says MacGillivray. "It proved to the federal

government that Halifax and Nova Scotia belong on the A-list when it comes to international events that the government wants to bring to Canada."

"Halifax has been very active in the last 20 years in the Canadian market," says Pat Lyall, the CEO of Destination Halifax. "The sector is showing signs of plateauing, and our competitive pools are changing and growing as more destinations add to their infrastructure. Halifax is now looking at the U.S. meetings-and-international-conference market with new approaches to selling the city."

Lyall's organization is flexible in its approach to marketing Halifax in the



MacGillivray believes a new Metro Centre and convention centre are integral for Halifax to enter the upper echelon of event destinations

longer-haul markets. “We’re recognized under a variety of geographic titles, and whichever one works best in a market is the one we leverage,” she says. “For example, in Europe aligning ourselves with the Canada brand is effective, while in the Boston area they know us better as Nova Scotia than Halifax.”

A recent bid by Halifax to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games, zealously advocated by MacGillivray, proved unsuccessful. “A city needs to demonstrate that it has either existing sports facilities and an athletes’ village, or sufficient funds and planning permission for building what is necessary,” says Andrea Bagnall, the executive assistant for the Commonwealth Games Federation. “It also needs to outline transport, staffing, marketing, and media plans for the event.” In other words, promises don’t sway organizers more than established infrastructure.

With that lesson in mind, MacGillivray believes a new Metro Centre and convention centre are integral for Halifax to enter the upper echelon of event destinations. “It’s compulsory that we do those things to grow our business,” he says. “Right now we’re spinning off up to \$150 million a year in the Nova Scotia community as a result of what we do in those facilities. Obviously, if we build larger ones that will grow to \$200 million to \$250 million, over time we’ll be putting that back into

the Nova Scotia economy.” MacGillivray asserts that Atlantic Canada is the only area of the country without a major sports-and-entertainment facility, a major convention facility, or an outdoor stadium. “It’s incumbent upon us as a municipality and a province to recognize that, if we’re going to grow the Atlantic region, Halifax and Nova Scotia have to take the lead,” he says.

The existing infrastructure currently is being used to its maximum capability. “That’s why we have to take the next step to put the new infrastructure in place to grow those opportunities,” says MacGillivray. “The provincial and municipal governments recognize that if we want to retain our A status, we must improve our infrastructure.” The returns on such an investment include large tax revenues for government, increased visibility for the municipality, and more businesses looking to locate here that, in turn, will draw more people to the province and convince others stay.

How does MacGillivray picture an ideal Halifax in 10 years? “The new Metro Centre and convention centre would be six or seven years old; we’d have a stadium located in Shannon Park entertaining a CFL football franchise and major concerts and events; and I’d be at the opening ceremonies of the 2014 Commonwealth Games,” he says. – **JOE FITZGERALD**