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Gretzky's Coyotes open new home in suburbs

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — The Phoenix Coyotes, a team that nearly left town two years ago, opened their new \$220 million home in the city's western suburbs with great fanfare Saturday night. Wayne Gretzky, Coyotes' managing partner, was omnipresent. The NHL's "Great One" knocked a pair of pucks through a team logo in front of the 17,779-seat building to climax the official opening ceremony. **(Related item: [New arena facts](#))**



Cindy Crawford and her son, Presley Gerber, join Wayne Gretzky's family at the Glendale Arena opener.



By Matt York, AP

Later, he and Glendale mayor Elaine Scruggs dropped the ceremonial first puck. Gretzky's 14-year-old daughter Paulina belted the national anthem to the cheers of the capacity crowd prior to the Coyotes' game against the Nashville Predators.

Coyotes officials toured 12 of the newest arenas, including Denver's Pepsi Center and the Staples Center in Los Angeles, incorporating the best of what they saw.

With expanded seating room, laser light shows that left paw prints on the ice and a configuration that made every seat a good one, the building was proclaimed as fine as any in the NHL by commissioner Gary Bettman.

"The first time I walked in the last couple of days, when it's pretty much been completed, I was flabbergasted at how beautiful it was," Gretzky said. "People are going to enjoy coming here and teams are going to enjoy playing here. It's a great facility."

For now, the building is simply the Glendale Arena until naming rights are sold, maybe by early next year.

"We're not going to rush it," owner Steve Fillman said.

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...were not going to pay it, either Steve Ellman said.
"We have financial stability today, and we're looking for the right name, the right sponsor. It's typically a 20-year commitment. I want to make sure that the corporate environment is right for what our project design is."

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Bettman was on hand, promising that he sees "an All-Star Game in the future" for the Coyotes, but not offering a specific date.



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The new arena is a positive development for a beleaguered league that could be facing a work stoppage next year as players and owners remain far apart in contract negotiations.

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"This building is a major step forward for this franchise," Bettman said at a news conference, "and this franchise wouldn't survive without it."

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Yet all was not positive for the home fans, as the Coyotes lost 3-1. (**Related item:** [Game report](#))

The Coyotes were on the brink of moving to Portland, Ore., when Ellman bought them, enlisted the help of Gretzky, gained financial assistance from new co-owner Jerry Moyes, and worked to get public backing for an arena.

The franchise had played in America West Arena since it had moved from Winnipeg in 1996. AWA is not configured for hockey, and one of the goal nets couldn't be seen from about 4,000 seats.

The Coyotes lost a reported \$30 million to \$35 million last season, and their revenue options were severely limited at America West Arena, owned and controlled by Jerry Colangelo's Phoenix Suns.

Ellman wanted to build the new arena in Scottsdale, but problems with the City Council led him to quietly work out a lucrative deal with Glendale, a fast-growing, aggressive community on Phoenix's long-neglected west side.

The new arena stands starkly amid cotton fields and other agricultural land, but there are big plans to change that in a metropolitan area that is the second-fastest growing, behind Las Vegas, in the country.

The Arizona Cardinals' new stadium is going up just a few hundred feet from the Glendale Arena, and is scheduled to be opened in the fall of 2006. A major shopping and entertainment complex also is planned nearby.

The opening ceremony, in chilly outdoor weather suitable for hockey, was a celebration for the westside, but the Coyotes still must depend heavily for now on their fan base from the eastern side of Phoenix.

Kent Campbell of Scottsdale, made the cross-city trek for the arena opener.

"It's beautiful," Campbell said. "It's going to add an extra 15 minutes to our commute each way, but it does feel more like a Coyotes' building, rather than America West. There are a lot of amenities."

Among the attractions, free parking in the vast lots that surround the building.

The arena is aggressively booking shows. Britney Spears and Bette Midler are scheduled for dates early next year. The Arizona Sting of the National Indoor Lacrosse League is a tenant.

But this is a hockey arena, pure and simple.

"It's cool, really cool," said John Hensel of Phoenix. "Where else do you have ice in the desert?"


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