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Build It and They Will

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN FRISCO may be the best-kept secret in Texas, but once the new soccer fields and Frisco Sports and Entertainment Center opens Frisco will be an international destination and everyone is going to want to know how it happened.

The soccer complex opening in Frisco will mark the latest sports coup in the city's bid to not only be known as a retail Mecca and destination point for tourists, but also a center for sports and entertainment.

While the retail industry started the

city's positive economic boom with the opening of Stonebriar Centre in 2000, the local sports industry continues to make local, state and national headlines with its success.

From the Frisco RoughRiders Double A baseball team to the Texas Tornado



Rendering of Frisco Sports & Entertainment Center provided by HKS Architectural Engineering & Planning

Come **By DeAnn Daley Holcomb**

junior hockey league team to the Dallas Stars professional hockey team setting up headquarters in Frisco – it has all positively impacted the city’s economy through rising property values and resounding sales tax revenue, along with attracting major companies, knocking

on the door of the city limits wanting to be a part of the action.

“We try to hit a home run every now and then,” said Jim Gandy of Frisco’s Economic Development Corporation.

That’s putting it mildly for this one-time small Texas town that started out

with one two-lane highway running through it.

The city, school district and county leaders have been very intentional in many of their decisions regarding development by keeping the focus on family and family activities. Those

careful decisions directed to family may be the partial reason for the success of the city.

“We first looked at finding things and events that would be family-friendly because we felt like there was not a lot of opportunity for families to have good clean fun,” said Frisco city manager George Purefoy. “We thought if we brought the venues up here that would be good for the family, it would also encourage people who aren’t use to coming to Frisco to come this way and visit, shop and have fun.”

The game plan appears to be working.

Frisco’s tax base increased a \$1billion for the fifth year to reach \$7.5 billion and the sales tax revenues are up around \$30 million dollars a year, according to the city’s 2004 figures.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES AND DEVELOPERS ARE EYEING FRISCO

Ikea will open its first North Texas furniture store in spring 2005 bringing in 500 new jobs. Store patrons will no longer have to caravan to Houston to shop. Embassy Suites is building a \$40 million, 13-story hotel adjoining the city’s \$20 million convention center next to the Dr. Pepper/Seven Up Ball Park. The hotel will have a great view, overlooking center field of the ballpark where the Frisco RoughRiders call home.

City leaders believe they have hit a home run with this latest development, putting Frisco in a better position to attract national conventions, boosting hotel and motel tax revenues and increasing the retail and restaurant business once the convention center opens in mid-2005.

Frisco Square at Main Street is humming day in and day out with activity as new city buildings are already under

construction like the new City Hall and Library facility, thanks to an explosive increase in city revenue the last couple of years.

FRISCO WANTED IT AND THEY GOT IT

Frisco knows how to wheel, deal, target and market. It’s been nearly two years since Frisco announced the FC



Frisco Square

photo by Chris Johnson

Dallas professional soccer team will be calling Frisco home and as opening day gets closer, the deal looks even more thrilling.

That dream deal, a public and private partnership, involves the building of the new \$65 million Frisco Soccer and Entertainment Center that will house FC Dallas (formerly Dallas Burn). Next door to the 21,193-seat stadium will be 17 full-size, tournament soccer fields for major youth soccer tournaments, football games, concerts and community events.

“We wanted to bring FC Dallas to Frisco,” says Frisco Mayor Mike Simpson. “We have a can-do attitude here so we find the way to do things and make it happen.”

While it is slow moving at the stadium construction site, due to recent heavy rains, the architectural graphics of the proposed 117-acre complex are breathtaking, from the walkway going into the front of the sports center to the groomed landscaping of the fields surrounding it.

The soccer complex received unanimous votes of support and public financial pledges from the City of Frisco, the Economic and Community Development Corporations, the Frisco Independent School District and Collin County Commissioners in connection with a private partnership and financial support from Hunt Sports Group.

“It is unheard of in this day for everyone to come together and unanimously vote in support of a sports center and this is a tremendous accomplishment for everyone involved,” said John Wagner, president of Hunt Sports Group. “This

center will be used year-round and will be the focal point of youth soccer in North Texas.”

Once completed with an opening set for June, Wagner says the sports park will represent one of the most unique soccer facilities in the world. It will be used 300-days a year with major league soccer matches, U.S. Women’s and Men’s national team matches, youth soccer and tournaments, concerts and high school football.

There is a whirl of excitement surrounding the countdown to opening



Rendering of Frisco Sports and Entertainment Center; below provided by HKS Architectural and Engineering Planning

day.

Already scheduled are youth and regional soccer tournaments and that means kids, more kids, parents and coaches, adding up to the need for food, entertainment and hotel rooms.

The economic impact will be enormous, for not only Frisco, but also the surrounding cities.

“You’re looking at as many as 18,000 hotel room nights for one of the larger tournaments and that means hotel rooms filling up from Frisco all the way down the Dallas Tollway to LBJ Freeway,” Wagner said.

Besides attendance at the FC Dallas soccer games, city leaders expect more than a million people, fans and soccer players to visit the sports complex each year.

The sports arena is located in the heart of the city at Main Street and the Dallas North Tollway.

“When you host a major youth soccer tournament you are bringing hundreds to thousands of people into the city and the economic impact on Frisco over the years will be in the \$millions,” Simpson said.

Purefoy says there have been additional land sales around the stadium and property values have dramatically increased, three-to-four times what is normal – movement the city has been anticipating.

“The stadium is creating lots of



“We think it’s been a great investment because it has brought a lot of people into Frisco and has added to the revenues throughout the city...”

interest and I believe the surrounding area is going to develop to a much higher standard than what we previously expected,” Purefoy said.

FRISCO’S GRAND SLAM

While the retail industry may have initially paved the road to Frisco, it has been the wildly successful Frisco RoughRiders baseball team, the Double-A affiliate of the Texas Rangers, continuing the momentum.

It was two years ago when Frisco celebrated the season opener for the RoughRiders at the city-owned Dr Pepper/Seven Up Ballpark with thousands showing up for the opening day game.

The dream team bringing baseball to Frisco included a partnership with the City of Frisco, the Frisco Independent School District, Southwest Sports Group and Mandalay Sports Entertainment.

You can see the exquisite architectural design of the stadium as you drive north on the Dallas Tollway past State Highway 121.

Fans fell in love with the award winning state-of-the-art facility, with seating designed so fans are close to the field and can feel a part of the action. Adding to the town’s baseball excitement, the RoughRiders won the Texas League Championship last year, a huge accomplishment for a team starting



Soccer Stadium Construction, above photo by Chris Johnson

Micahel Turner, goalie for Legacy Christian Academy, below photo provided by Legacy Christian Academy

only its third season this coming April.

“We think it’s been a great investment because it has brought a lot of people into Frisco and has added to the revenues throughout the city from hotels, motels, restaurants to retail,” Simpson said. “It has become a ‘destination location’ for people wanting to come to Frisco, drawing out-of-town fans and fans from neighboring cities.”

It has also become a business attraction.

“As we talk to companies looking at moving up and down the Tollway they look closely at the popularity of the ballpark,” Simpson said. “Businesses are looking at it as a place to take business clients or to buy a box seat or a luxury box to entertain, so it has been a positive business influence.”

Frisco city leaders predict the ballpark will continue to have an economic impact of millions of dollars with profits at the ballpark from ticket sales and food, but the figures may not include the total impact of sports fans eating in local restaurants, shopping and attending other Frisco events.

Meanwhile, baseball fans are counting the days for the season to begin.

“Fans get to see great new players who want to become major baseball players like Lance Nix and it is a fun family event everyone looks forward to,” Simpson said.

No doubt a home run for everyone.



“Fans get to see great new players who want to become major baseball players like Lance Nix and it is a fun family event everyone looks forward to.”

“We have great expectations on what we want to do and who we want to be in the future and we’re reaching those goals as a business, as a community partner in Frisco and as a leader in the entertainment and family business,” said Mike McCall, president and general manager of the Frisco RoughRiders. “I believe a sports team is a factor in the soul of the city along with your church, your family and your schools. A sports team gives you that emotional aspect of having something to cheer for and be proud of.”

It is McCall’s job to make sure the fans return year after year.

McCall and his team develop clever marketing incentives for season ticket holders, making it a financial grand slam to join the Founders Club and enjoy choice seats, a buffet dinner, dessert and drinks in the club and VIP parking – just a few of the perks if you are a member.

McCall says it is important to keep ticket prices affordable for families. The RoughRiders latest promotion of the “The Teddy Section,” inspired by the original RoughRider himself, Teddy Roosevelt, will include a free hot dog and soda with a ticket purchased in that section.

The stadium seats around 8,000 with an overflow capacity thanks to the addition of the popular grass berm where you can sit on the lawn, enjoy the game and watch the kids chasing down



Dr. Pepper StarCenter
photo by Chris Johnson

athlete with a fan is great and getting the player's autographs can be especially memorable when they make it to the major league."

McCall adds, "You can always tell your family and friends, 'Hey I met that

player when he was in the minor league,' and it was in Frisco."

“...the hockey players are hoping for a shot at playing in the professional league some day and the competitiveness adds to the excitement.”

Also, a favorite with the fans is Deuce, the RoughRiders Prairie Dog mascot, also known as “King of the Prairie Dogs.” Deuce makes hundreds of public appearances each year. Deuce, the chubby prairie dog with the bright red suit, can be seen around town, leading the local parade, at the opening of the new Senior Center or at an area elementary school. He is always on call for community appearances and for

local school events.

“The mascots have become true icons in Frisco and the kids love to see them,” Simpson said. “They do a lot to promote sports in the city.”

FRISCO'S POWER PLAY

It was a dual power play for Frisco – not only attracting the Texas Tornado Junior A Hockey team to Frisco to play in the Dr Pepper StarCenter, but also becoming the practice and training headquarters for the Dallas Stars professional hockey team and home to the Dallas Stars corporate offices. The center stands next door to the Dr Pepper/Seven Up Ballpark, creating a cozy sports complex atmosphere.

The Texas Tornado relocated to Frisco last year and fit right in with Frisco's continuing success story by winning the USA Hockey Junior A National Championship. The Texas Tornado also won the NAHL Southern Division for the 5th year in a row and set an all-time NAHL record by winning 48 regular season games last year. The team is back this season defending its title.

Inside the high-tech Dr Pepper StarCenter, the Texas Tornado can be seen preparing for an upcoming game in the Deja Blue 3,700-seat arena, one of two NHL-size ice arenas inside the center.

“We want to make it a tradition in Frisco that you go to the hockey games on Friday or Saturday nights in the fall and winter and then you go to the playoffs in the spring,” says Tornado coach and general manager Tony Curtale, who was awarded NAHL Coach of the Year last season. “I want to make it a part of the Frisco lifestyle.”

That wish may be coming true,

home run balls. The Frisco RoughRiders play to a near sell-out crowd every game.

But McCall sees more than the dollar signs, although he knows that is part of the deal.

Through his son, McCall realized the impact the RoughRiders team is having in the community.

“I asked my son, Greg, who was ten years old at the time, what he liked most about the stadium and the team,” McCall said.

“He said, ‘Dad, I like that I can sit on the grass and catch home runs and I like that you get to talk to the players and get their autographs’ and from a child's perspective I discovered that is what is important.”

McCall said he also realizes how important it has been for the players to take the time to visit with fans.

“These kids know the players and what a baseball memory that is,” McCall said. “You don't get that in the major league. The intimacy of the minor league



Deuce, the RoughRiders mascot cheers the crowd.

photo provided by the RoughRiders

according to owner Kirby Schlegel who says the Texas Tornado has played to several sellout crowds after only playing its second season here.

Schlegel said, “We try to make our games appealing to everyone whether you are four years old or 70.”

Similar to the RoughRiders, the hockey players are hoping for a shot at playing in the professional league some day and Schlegel says that competitiveness adds to the excitement of the game. While most of the hockey players transition through the college level NCAA Division I, some players have been directly drafted to the professional league.

“You see fast skating, hard hitting hockey because these players are giving all they have to reach their goal to one day make it to the professional level and the fans enjoy it,” Schlegel said.

The Texas Tornado play around 80 games a season.

“Hockey fits right in because it’s a physical sport and Texans like the mix,”

Curtale said. “Not only is hockey a sport so many enjoy but we want to be a beneficial part of the community for a long time. Some of our players come from all across the country from New York, Michigan, Canada and this is a great area for our players to work and live and be a part of a growing community.”

“At the StarCenter we’ve had everything from a high school dance, gymnastics, and fundraisers, like ‘Monopoly Night on the Ice.’”

Recently, after one Friday night game, the players teamed up with the local Salvation Army to hold an auction of game-used hockey sticks with the

proceeds going to the tsunami relief, one of many events the team is involved with in the Frisco community.

“We want to make Texas Tornado Frisco’s team and we hope to attract fans from Dallas, Plano, McKinney, all around,” Schlegel said. “Our business and corporate partners are also an important part of our success now and in the future.”

As Mayor Simpson will tell you, the arena is not just a hub for hockey. There are general skating, figure skating and hockey leagues available.

The Kurt Thomas Gymnastics center also calls the Dr Pepper StarCenter home. The former Olympian and three-time world champion offers gymnastics classes from preschool to the professional level. Each February the StarCenter plays host to the Kurt Thomas Invitational where Olympic hopefuls display their amazing talent in the quest to make the team.

“At the StarCenter we’ve had everything from a high school dance,

gymnastics, fund raisers like “Monopoly Night on the Ice,” figure skating and this summer we converted the arena into a basketball venue and we had the Chinese Olympic Basketball team play the Dallas Mavericks Summer team,” Simpson said.

From all of this, city officials estimate an economic impact of more than \$63 million over the next ten years.

As Mayor Simpson knows, success does not happen unless everyone pulls together and when that occurs, the sky is the limit for what a city can accomplish. Simpson says the variety of sports venues, not only impacts the economic growth of the city but it has made a difference in the quality of life by providing positive outlets and events for families to attend together.

“All of these organizations, the RoughRiders, Texas Tornado, FC Dallas and the Dallas Stars are all good citizens in the city sponsoring events, promoting and being a part of our local events whether it’s the “Freedom Fest” or the “Gary Burns Fun Run,” Simpson said. “These organizations are big supporters of our community and that makes them important family members.”

THE PAYOFF FOR FRISCO

The payoff for Frisco can be seen and heard with the pounding of hammers to the walls of new buildings going up every day as construction sites are popping up all around the city.

As a part of the Sports and Entertainment Complex located east of the intersection of State Highway

121 and the North Dallas Tollway, you can see the city’s 115,000 square foot convention center starting to take shape next to the 13-story, 321-room Embassy Suites hotel. City leaders expect future retail and office space to



Dr. Pepper 7 Up Ballpark

photo by Chris Johnson

Gymnastics Center, could generate millions over a ten-year period. The fast pace changes happening throughout the city will continue in 2005.

The new Senior Center has already opened followed by the new Public Works facility. The new Frisco City Hall and Library Facility is under construction in Frisco Square, scheduled to open this year.

The Central Fire Station expansion will include “Safety Town,” a one-of-its-kind area hands-on educational environment for children. It will feature a miniature city with buildings representing the local landscape and smaller versions of cars and bicycles will dot the street. Officials hope this hands-on atmosphere will better deliver the important message of safety. It will be located on two-acres next to the new Central Fire

Department close to the intersection of Main Street and Gary Burns Drive.

Other big projects include the building of a new police facility, the start of Heritage Village, additional park and trail plans and later this year, groundbreaking ceremonies are scheduled for the \$20 million recreation and aquatic center.

“It’s good we waited to build these buildings because by waiting we are able to build better quality structures because of funding coming in from the sports and retail,” Purefoy said.

Build it and they will keep coming is Frisco’s plan.

DeAnn Daley Holcomb is a freelance writer living in Plano.

finish the circle.

“...these organizations, the RoughRiders, Texas Tornado, FCDallas, and the Dallas Stars are all good citizens in the city sponsoring events...”

City officials hope when the development is completed, the \$67 million investment in the Dr Pepper StarCenter, the Dr Pepper/Seven Up Ballpark and the Kurt Thomas