



NHL WINTER CLASSIC

NHL, Rangers partner on latest Winter Classic Legacy Project

Graves, Richter, LaFontaine help unveil renovated youth leadership center in Bronx

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NEW YORK -- The 2018 Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres at Citi Field in New York on Jan. 1 (1 p.m. ET; NBC, SN, TVA Sports NHL.TV) will be remembered for the NHL's latest Legacy Project as well as the action on the ice.

On Tuesday, 13 days before the game, the newest Legacy Project -- a philanthropic activity designed to support a community organization in the host city of the League's tentpole events -- was officially unveiled: a refurbished youth leadership center at the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) in the Bronx.

Renovations included a computer lab and lounge on the first floor, with new computers, workstations, new floors and painted walls, as well as a new library and studio on the second floor.

The Rangers, along with the Garden of Dreams Foundation, the Smilezone Foundation and Brightcore Energy, partnered with WHEDco to oversee the project.

"If you can come in and transform a place like this with paint and murals and new computers, it does something for the spirit," said former Rangers forward Adam Graves, a Garden of Dreams board member and a co-founder of Smilezone Foundation. "It puts a smile on the kids' faces and gives them an environment to succeed. At the end of the day, it's all about the kids. The mission is simple: to support kids and put a smile on kids' faces. It doesn't get any better than this."

WHEDco's mission is to help residents of the South Bronx get access to necessary resources to create thriving neighborhoods through high-quality education and after-school programs.

"More than a learning space, it's been a safe haven," WHEDco president Davon Russell said. "It's where high school students who participate in our College Access program spend their afternoon, connecting with peers and mentors. It's where parents and grandparents who are learning English are defying the odds to become better advocates for themselves and their families."

Graves and former teammates Mike Richter and Pat LaFontaine were on hand for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Richter, the goaltender on New York's Stanley Cup-winning team in 1994, is the president of Brightcore Energy, which provided the lightning for the Leadership Center.

"When you talk about energy efficiency, Brightcore Energy is putting in a new technology into the youth center that looks better, lasts longer and is cheaper to run," Richter said. "It will pay for itself in the next decade and a half."

Richter was more than happy to help his former teammates with the project.

"It's like being a particular part of any team," he said. "You're a particular piece of the puzzle that makes the whole work. When kids are in a space that is clean, comfortable, safe environment, they will make the most out of their opportunities in sports and life."

Graves said it was especially gratifying to leave a legacy in New York, where he played and still works with the Rangers. He's been a part of the opening and refurbishing of more than 100 Smilezones across Canada, but this was the first one in the United States.

"I consider myself a Canadian New Yorker," Graves said. "Certainly this is a home away from home. Understanding the kids and the need and all the great work that the Garden of Dreams does -- and I've been part of it since 2006 -- and getting to know so many of those 350,000 kids that have benefitted from the Garden of Dreams to be able to partner up as a young foundation down here ... to be able to come into the Bronx and start with a project like this, it is very impactful."

LaFontaine, a Hockey Hall of Fame member and the NHL's vice president of hockey development and community affairs, has been a part of numerous legacy projects.

"What's really important is giving back," LaFontaine said. "We are so lucky to have fans like you who support us and as the game goes on, it's truly about leaving something behind and this is truly a legacy room. This is a legacy project. The NHL is proud of it, so to have the curriculum and to have the education and the community and the art and to have a place for teens to come to and just be teens, is really special."

"We are creating a legacy project here with everybody, but I think that some of the kids might create their own legacy one day."

The children received Rangers Winter Classic jerseys and enjoyed their new computer room and library.

"These are the reasons why we do what we do," Russell said. "We want to provide for them, we want to have them able to participate in the Bronx and change it. [The Rangers have] always been there for us. Our kids have had wonderful experiences through you. It's made a mark and we are truly, truly grateful."

Link: <https://www.nhl.com/news/nhl-and-new-york-rangers-partner-on-winter-classic-legacy-project/c-294184912>