



Wayne Pansegrau, manager of operations at Kelowna's Prospera Place, takes measurements with infrared surface temperature, air temperature and humidity devices. Pansegrau will be going to the 2010 Winter Games as one of two assistants to Dan Craig, in charge of the Olympic hockey ice surface.

GARY NYLANDER/*The Okanagan Saturday*

SATURDAY SPECIAL

Experts seize golden chance

Okanagan icemaker, groomer, physiotherapist see volunteering for 2010 Winter Games as once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

By J.P. SQUIRE Jan 9/10
The Okanagan Saturday A1

Quietly, often behind the scenes, the Okanagan has developed world-class experts in many sports. The ultimate compliment for many of them is to be accepted as volunteers in senior positions at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics. They will prepare the venues, provide medical services and organize the competitions for the world's best athletes.



Among the hundreds of Valley residents heading to the Games are: master icemaker Wayne Pansegrau, manager of operations at Prospera Place in Kelowna; groomer Bill Pifer from

Sovereign Lake Nordic Club in the North Okanagan; and Penticton physiotherapist Shandia Cordingley.

"This is the pinnacle of men's hockey right now (and) the pinnacle of ice-making," said Pansegrau, 37, who was born and raised in Kelowna.

"I've never had the chance to work at any of those Winter Classics (outdoor NHL games), but I'm hoping to do that in the future."

Pansegrau and two buddies, former icemakers at Prospera Place, thought it would be great to volunteer as drivers at the four Olympic ice venues.

One of those ice-making buddies is Mike Craig, whose father, Dan, is in charge of ice surfaces for the National Hockey League and also in charge of the ice for the 2010 Games. Dan and Mike were responsible for the ice at the recent Winter Classic in Boston.

Instead of simply driving an ice resurfacers, Pansegrau will be one of two assistants to Dan Craig, supervising 10 drivers and 12 on-ice crews.

After several interviews, a security screening and a training session, he had a 12-day practical test under Craig during the world Paralympic sledge hockey championships at UBC in March.

"It was pretty unreal. Our philosophies on ice are obviously very, very similar, so I think that's why we hit it off so well, and that's probably one of the reasons why he wanted me to be one of his supervisors," said Pansegrau.

He and a 22-member crew will head to Vancouver before the Games to install ice at GM Place, UBC, a practice sheet at UBC and a second practice sheet near downtown.

"It's really been hard to think about it — we've had a pretty busy year here at Prospera

— but now I'm starting to get excited."

Pansegrau will be joined by Mike Craig, who will supervise at GM Place, Jeff Fletcher from Mount Boucherie arenas, who will drive at GM Place, and Kevin Wutke from Winfield Arena, who will drive at UBC.

One of Pansegrau's challenges will be keeping drivers focused since a lot of them work at arenas that hold 500 to 1,000 people, not the thousands who will pack Olympic hockey games.

"There's quite a bit of pressure on the drivers, obviously," he said. "It will be a little bit stressful for them at the beginning."

Most drivers are familiar with Zambonis, not the Olympia ice resurfacers, so there will be a bit of a learning curve, he said.

Pansegrau was responsible for the ice during the Memorial Cup, world junior games and Olympic camp at Prospera, and his ice quality has been rated in the top third in the Western Hockey League. He has worked as an engineer and icemaker for 15 years, the last 10-plus at Prospera. ***

Cordingley, a physiotherapist at the Sports Clinic — Dale Charles Physiotherapy in the City Centre building in Penticton, will be part of the host medical team providing health-care services to athletes.

"I've always wanted to go and work at the Olympics," said the 35-year-old Cordingley, who was born and raised in Kelowna. "With this one being so close, I thought I better try."

Cordingley has volunteered her services with the national team program, working with the Alpine Canada women, as well as

World Cup skiing and snowboard competition and the Europa Cup team in Europe for slalom and giant slalom.

"I really enjoy watching the Olympics," said Cordingley.

However, she noted it won't be all fun and games, since she will be working shifts of 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. or 3-11 p.m. practically every day for the two weeks of the Olympics, and then during the second week of the Paralympic Games.

The volunteers include physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists and medical doctors from as far east as Ontario, and even some from outside the country.

"With the athletes coming from all over the world, some of them bring their own physiotherapists. It will be great to be able to exchange ideas and learn new things. Everyone has their ways of doing things, and you try to learn as much as you can."



DAVID CROMPTON/The Okanagan Saturday
Penticton physiotherapist Shandia Cordingley puts fellow physiotherapist Michael Yates, owner of the Sports Clinic — Dale Charles Physiotherapy, through a test on an exercise machine. Cordingley is volunteering at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and Paralympics.

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Byron Bolton, vice-president of the Vernon Ski Club and 2009 ski swap chairman, is part of a group from Vernon volunteering for the course crew at Olympic alpine events.

"There's almost a half-dozen of us that are going to be on the hill: on the downhill, on the giant slalom, on the slalom, on the course helping out with the safety, the security and the setup for the Olympic events," he said.

"We're committed almost two weeks of our time. I look at it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We're busy guys; we've got full-time jobs. Most of these guys have senior positions in companies that are all looking at this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to experience the Olympics in our backyard.

"It's going to be here before we know it. I'm getting very excited about the Olympics (and) very excited about skiing."

Sovereign's Pifer is grooming the cross-country venues at the Olympics for 16 days, and then at the Paralympics for 14 days, as part of a crew of 10 coming from B.C., Ontario and Quebec.

He's an example that it's not just what you know, but who you know.

Mike Edwards, former general manager at Sovereign, is now assistant operations manager at Whistler Olympic Park. And Rob Bernhardt, former club president, is the chief of competition for cross-country skiing at the Olympics.

"When the Vancouver Olympics were first announced, I mentioned (to Edwards) that it would be interesting to have that as a highlight of a grooming career. We chuckled about it. Then he wound up going out there to work and gave me a call when they were looking for groomers," said Pifer.

"I've worked three different World Cup races, which are (of) fairly high calibre, with athletes from all over the world, but this will be a highlight, for sure. The Olympics is the crowning effort — the top of the top."

He got some practical experience when he groomed the World Cup race course at Whistler Olympic Park for eight days in January 2009.

"It would probably be very close to the final product for the Olympics. There are some real critical shapes we will have to maintain for the TV cameras."

Sovereign has consistent temperatures and dry Okanagan powder, while the Olympic park can get a metre of light, soft snow and then get 7.5 centimetres of rain, "which can make it pretty challenging," he admitted.

"They've got a good lineup of equipment, so it is just a matter of getting out and having the time to be able address it, to attack it before the actual event. The critical thing is the timing.

"I think it is a great opportunity. I'm really excited and I'm really looking forward to it. World Cup events demand fairly exact process, some very careful grooming (and) attention to detail. This is just another step up."

Pifer, 53, got into grooming using a snowmobile in 1990 when the North Okanagan Cross-Country Ski Club (now Sovereign Lake) was allowed into Silver Star Provincial Park. He now works full time during the winter, grooming and maintaining the equipment.

Another 10-15 members of Sovereign Lake Nordic Club, who officiated at the 2008 World Cup and recent Olympic trials in the North Okanagan, have volunteered for the Olympic cross-country races.

One of the tough assignments is finding out how many Okanagan residents are volunteering at the Olympics as there is no local representative or committee in charge of them. VANOC organizers did not return phone messages for more information.

So, most people find out about volunteers heading to the Coast through word of mouth.

Doug Nicholas, general manager of PacificSport Okanagan in Kelowna, recently found out his Kelowna aunt volunteered as a vehicle driver and will be taking the Nepalese Olympic team around the Lower Mainland during the Games.