
25TH ANNIVERSARY OF PSB GYM OPENING

*Written by Insp. Cam Baldwin
October 29, 2021.*



One of the well-equipped gyms, 5th floor HQ. 2021

When the Headquarters (HQ) building was being constructed, several large gyms were envisioned on the 5th floor to support members in leading an active and healthy lifestyle.

These rooms were planned around the early gyms that had been built by members and carved out of any space that became available in the old police buildings.

November 2021 marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of the first gym/fitness center at the old Public Safety Building (PSB), 151 Princess Street.

The PSB gym was the forerunner to our current fitness centers at HQ and district stations and marks an achievement benefiting police and civilian members then, now and into the future.

During the late 80's and early '90s, several fitness-minded members in each Division advocated for gym space eventually gaining support and partnership of the WPS Executive, the WPA and the City. The first facilities were built from scratch with a limited budget and basic equipment.

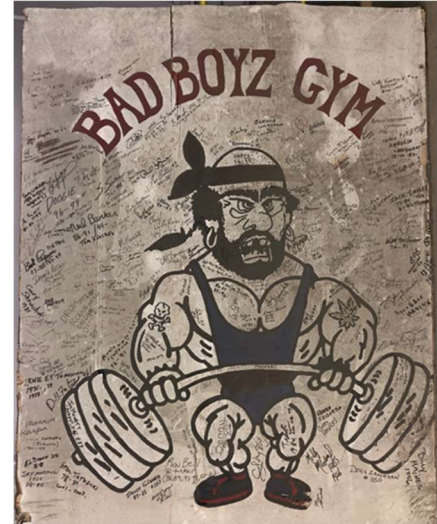
Officers Dale Ridley and Stu Garrett were amongst those whose persistence eventually transformed the idea into reality. The original space at PSB was in the basement, carved out of an area where Stores had been located after their move to another building.

The first gyms were located at the St James Station on Lyle and the Vice gym at 55 Princess, buildings that closed when HQ and the West District Stations were opened. Additional facilities came into place between 1994 and 1997 at the old District 4, 5 & 6 stations on Plessis Rd., Dumoulin St., and Pembina Hwy respectively (and soon to be old District 3 station on Hartford).

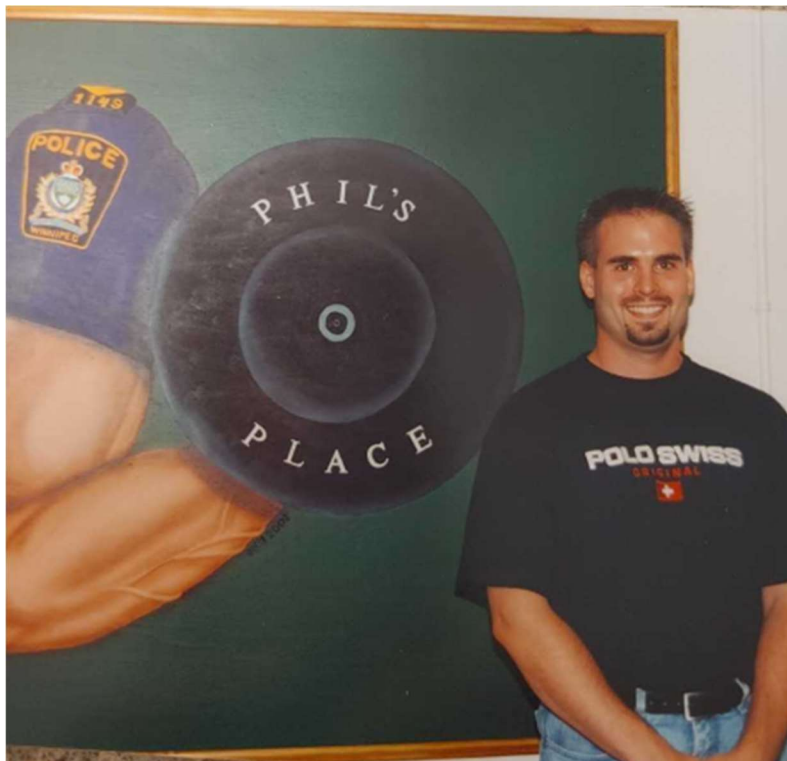
Vice Division was the frontrunner, unofficially claiming space in the basement of 55 Princess St., establishing “Bad Boyz Gym” several years earlier.

During the early days of the PSB gym members such as Andy Zurawsky, Wes Johnson (the twin towers) Stef Schimnowski, Tammy Skrabek, Petra Becker and Art Stannard, led the way as positive fitness role models.

Prior to the establishment of our own police gyms, members who wished to stay fit and street-ready had few other choices than to obtain memberships at local gyms. Favorite haunts back then were World Gym on McPhillips, Golds on St. James Street and Fit Stop on Provencher. Some of our senior members will recall some of the physical specimens from days gone by.



In a previous Police Museum article. John Burchill mentioned, wrestler Armin Stoke, famous for his 4:30 am workouts. Other strongmen included Danny Hutch, Bob Irwin, Bobby Draho, Jim Swanson and George Sidorow. Female officers Linda Kisil and Susan Oades taught aerobics/fitness classes but in those days had no other choice than to use outside facilities. Draho, who competed (and won) in the heavyweight division of the 1987 Mr. Manitoba Bodybuilding Championships, had to cut the seams on the sleeves of his police shirts to accommodate his massive biceps.



Forensic Artist P/Sgt Kevyn Bourgeois (ret.) pictured here with the sign at the entrance of Phil's Place Gym

The locker room environment was vastly different prior to the establishment of our gyms. With cramped space, there was a different standard of deportment in those days and it was not uncommon for veteran members to wear their police shirts to and from work under a jacket. Overweight members and cigarette smoke, along with the stale smell of 'less-than-crisp' uniforms was not uncommon. By comparison, today's locker rooms sport buff bodies, moussed hair, the smell of cologne, and cleaner sharper uniforms.

The new PSB gym was named "Phil's Place" in honor of fallen brother and gym advocate Phil Lexier #1149, who passed suddenly the previous summer while participating in a Dragon Boat Race fundraising event.

The first PSB stereo system really put out the decibels, which at times created complaints from work Units located in the basement or just above on the main floor. One such incident involved D/C Shelley Hart giving Insp Steve Pilot a scolding as he blasted out some heavy metal tunes. iTunes and earbuds create a considerably quieter atmosphere today.

Much of the credit for the development of these facilities belongs to former fitness coordinator Hilton Wood. Under his guidance, the Service established fitness standards, annual fitness testing, annual EDL incentives, and member governance committees.

Excerpts from Wood quoted in Spotlight magazine (January 2003).

"When I started [in 1990], there were no fitness facilities in any of our buildings, but there was a strong desire to create in-house workout areas. Small groups of dedicated members in each Division developed their gyms from scratch with the co-operation of the City, Winnipeg Police Association and corporate sponsors."

"Incentives are also an integral part of the CBA Fitness Plan as well, as officers meeting the requirements can earn extra duty leave bypassing their annual assessment."

"If you are on track with your workouts and diet 80 percent of the time, you can get away with not worrying as much that 20 percent of the time you stray from the plan."



◆ Fitness Coordinator Hilton Wood puts about 700 members through their paces each year as part of the Fitness Appraisal program.

The Physical Fitness Appraisal Program became part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in 1988 identifying a Fitness Standard for all Police Officers and included incentives as well as sanctions. This led to the hiring of Wood a full-time fitness coordinator. Recruit Class #114 (graduating Sept 7th, 1990) was the first group required to participate in the mandatory fitness appraisal program.

In 2018 Hilton passed the fitness coordinators torch to Brad Gerbrandt who continues to promote and develop the program, adding quarterly well-being reports, expansion of equipment, state of the art body composition equipment and noon hour workout sessions. Darrel Selley as equipment manager has done a remarkable job of ensuring that all the equipment in all of the districts, is kept in tip-top shape.

For those members hired after these facilities were established, appreciate the benefit and never take it for granted. Our fitness facilities offer us a world-class gym environment, adding convenience to our lives; cost efficiency and the ability to time manage our rotating shift schedules. Overall these facilities positively impact our physical and mental well-being enhancing organizational comradery and workplace culture.

The addition of police gymnasiums has had a significant positive impact on the physical and mental well-being of both our police and civilian staff and improves our continued ability to deliver exceptional police service.

As a regular user of all of these gyms throughout the years, I would like to thank all of you, both serving and retired, for your commitment to build, support and grow these facilities over the past 25 years.

McGregor top cop in Fittest Crime Stopper Challenge



John McKay hoists 390lbs to take top spot in the Bench Press Competition.

Congratulations to the Cst. Greg McGregor and Clerk Petra Becker for being named the Fittest Crime Stoppers for 2003. With her win Becker becomes the first person to successfully defend a championship title since the Challenge's inception four years ago. Following is a breakdown of this year's results:

Top Three Overall

Male

- 1st – Greg McGregor
- 2nd – John McKay
- 3rd – Clyde Raven

Female

- 1st – Petra Becker
- 2nd – Cheryl Stupack
- 3rd – Anna Janzen

Event Winners

Bench Press (One Rep. Maximum)

Male

John McKay 390 lbs
(Broke his own record)

Female

Michelle Wagner 125 lbs

Both of these participants win the Phil Lexier Memorial Bench Press Award given annually to the strongest male and female.

Bench Press (Cadence)

Male

John McKay 70
(Broke his own record)

Female

Petra Becker 68
(Broke her own record)

5km Road Race (Running)

Male

Greg McGregor 21:58

Female

Kelly McCartney 23:15

Celebrity Challenger

This year's Challenge saw the addition of a special challenger in the form of Winnipeg Sun reporter Cary Castagna who had a respectable showing in this year's challenge, and an interesting recap story on the experience in Oct. 19th issue of the Sun.

The article is reprinted with permission on Page 11.

John McKay (pictured) wins *Phil Lexier Memorial Bench Press Award* Spotlight Newsletter, April 2003.

