

Portfolio Note: This article was written for the *Manor Park Chronicle*, a community newspaper in Ottawa, Ontario, as a profile piece for a historic sport center rebranding campaign.

Community Connection Through Sports

You can find a variety of literature supporting the benefits of sporting activities, but enhanced mental and physical benefits are only part of the equation. Sporting activities also build relationships, and that's one thing that Nicki Bridgland, Founder & CEO of Rideau Sports Centre, is most passionate about.

"Growing up as an only child, I needed to constantly create friendships, so that I had people to play with," Nicki said. "One of my greatest passions is my circle of friends, and another passion is helping other people create their own circles of friendships. This is where my love of human connection first formed."

Founding the Ottawa Sport and Social Club in 2003, Nicki worked to grow the club by focusing on the element of human connection inherent in sports. She found that her efforts resonated strongly with the public, leading her to expand the Sport and Social Club model to six other cities across Canada.

That success led her to step into a critical role of what she hopes will be Ottawa's "downtown playground". Built on the grounds of the former Rideau Tennis Club, Nicki has worked to shift the aim of the property of 1 Donald Street from a members-only establishment to a community-inclusive environment offering an array of sporting activities, live music, and options for a fantastic meal.

"I saw an incredible opportunity to create a facility where *everyone* is welcome and encouraged to participate and enjoy many different sports and activities," Nicki explained.

While community connection is the driving focus, it's not without economic merit. The Rideau's business model is open to the public and pay-to-play. "That is," Nicki said, "you can participate in any of our court rentals, fitness programs, yoga classes, restaurant, massage, children's camps - by simply paying for what you wish to use."

Nicki aims to keep prices "deliberately affordable" with most activities offering drop-in attendance at an established rate and package deals offering a slight discount. Yoga,

for example, is \$15 per class on drop-in or \$12 per class as part of a package. The Rideau also offers monthly rates on select activities.

Outside of sports, the Rideau is home to the Clubhouse Restaurant, which offers dining options year-round for everything from date night to weekend brunch. Nicki also points out that the Clubhouse is great for events and provides some of the best patios in the city during the summer months.

At the end of the day, everything the Rideau offers is built around human connections. For Nicki, the work isn't done yet. "Now that the foundation is built and renovations fully complete, it is about attracting as many people to our facility – all ages from babies to seniors – we have programming for everyone," she said.

The Rideau is also working to expand the property footprint, and to open up the building views to the river.

For more information about the Rideau's sports offering, pricing, and mission, be sure to find them online at www.rideausportscentre.com or on Facebook (Rideau Sports Centre), Twitter (@RideauSports) and Instagram (@rideausportscentre).