

# Convention Centre meant \$100M for local economy in full first year, report says

BY MATTHEW PEARSON, OTTAWA CITIZEN    MAY 13, 2013



Ottawa Convention Centre CEO Patrick Kelly began pushing for a new facility as long ago as 1988.

**Photograph by:** Cole Burston, Cole Burston/For Ottawa Citizen

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OTTAWA — The Ottawa Convention Centre pumped more than \$100 million into the local economy in its first full year of operation, says an economic impact report to be released Monday.

The \$179-million facility opened in April 2011, but the latest study, prepared by market research firm Ipsos, focused solely on the 2012 calendar year.

It found that 57 big-ticket events that drew more than a quarter of attendees from outside the Ottawa-Gatineau region — the NHL All-Star Weekend and the national Liberal convention among them — attracted more than 47,000 people from outside Ottawa and were responsible for \$94 million in direct spending on everything from hotels and meals to taxis and haircuts.

Add on the convention centre's \$7.1 million in production costs and the estimate tops \$100 million.

The latest figure builds on the estimated \$85 million the OCC added to the economy in 2011, when it was only open for nine months.

“Now that we have a proper meeting place, we’ve become a very, very strong convention destination,” said CEO Pat Kelly.

“There are so many different types of conventions and trade shows that stayed away from Ottawa in past years because there wasn’t enough floor space in a facility downtown.”

Case in point: For the first time in a generation, the premier trade show to market Canadian tourism destinations to international buyers has brought more than 1,000 delegates to the city this week for its annual Rendez-vous Canada event.

“Here we are, the nation’s capital, and we haven’t seen this for 25 years,” Kelly said Sunday, as registration got underway and vendors busily set up their booths.

The convention centre appears to be paying the kind of dividends proponents had for years said it would.

Kelly began pushing for a new convention facility in 1988, two decades before demolition began, because he knew the city was routinely being overlooked.

In those days, the biggest deterrent to attracting conferences of any size or significance was the Ottawa Congress Centre, which was too small and too rundown for many convention planners.

Designed by architect Ritchard Brisbin, the new 390,000-square-foot facility — almost three times the size of the old Congress Centre — was designed to put the city back on the map and help Ottawa carve out a chunk of the more than \$263-billion market for conventions in North America.

Ottawa’s new facility puts it in the same tier as Calgary and Quebec City, but Kelly says it’s location in the nation’s capital often means that it competes for business against the likes of convention centres in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

Although the striking building — some say its glassy facade looks like a tulip bulb on its side — is already two years old, the city itself as a primary convention destination remains a novelty, Kelly said.

“There’s still a lot of meeting planners out there who are learning about Ottawa for the first time.”

But the convention centre can’t take all the credit.

Conference planners are looking for the whole package — a destination city that will excite prospective attendees, an airport with strong national and international connections, a high number of quality hotel rooms nearby, and dining, cultural or recreational amenities for those well-deserved nights off from the convention floor.

Kelly says his organization works closely with Ottawa Tourism, the hotels association and the airport, among others.

“Everyone is quite cognizant of the benefits of convention activity in the city and (they) are stepping

up to the plate.”

And even though it is located downtown, Kelly claims convention business benefits all corners of the city. The more large-scale convention business that downtown Ottawa is able to attract in the course of a year, the more business flows out of the downtown core.

As Kelly puts it: “Rising waters lift every canoe.”

Kelly said the economic impact report may help the OCC in its current effort to sell its naming rights.

It wants to find a company that would buy the right to put its name on the building and is hoping to find an appropriate corporate partner by the end of the year.

The Ipsos economic impact report focused on three types of spending: Delegate and exhibitor costs, such as accommodations, transportation, parking, entertainment, recreation, meals, shopping, and personal services, which include spending due to the events themselves and spending on the days before or after, as well as exhibit production costs, such as equipment rentals and services, shipping and customs clearance, and local production of signage and printing.

### **By the numbers**

#### **\$101 million**

Direct spending in Ottawa-Gatineau as a result of 57 big-ticket events at the Ottawa Convention Centre in 2012

#### **\$179M**

Cost of new Ottawa Convention Centre, which opened in April 2011

#### **\$38M**

Total generated tax revenue in 2012

#### **390,000**

Total square footage of the new facility, almost three times the size of the old Ottawa Congress Centre

#### **\$375.43**

Average amount of money out-of-town convention centre delegates spent on meals and drinks in 2012

**380**

Number of salaried, full-time, part-time and casual employees at the convention centre

**Source:** *Ottawa Convention Centre Economic Impact Report, 2012 Calendar Year*

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