

Winnipeg Free Press

 **PRINT THIS**

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Parking-lot rivalry heats up

Rates unlikely to drop, but services may improve

By: **Murray McNeill**

Posted: **02/11/2012 1:00 AM** | Comments: **0** (including replies)g



JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS [Enlarge Image](#)

Richard Wishnowski of Vinci Park says it hopes to get a foothold in the city by establishing a better level of service for parking-facility owners and their customers.

The biggest parking-lot operator in the world is setting up shop in Winnipeg to challenge Imperial Parking's 15-year domination of the local market.

Vinci Park, which is also the second-largest operator in Canada behind Impark, opened an office in the

city last month with the goal of stealing away business from Impark and other local operators.

Its arrival, coupled with the entry a little over two years ago of U.S.-based giant Standard Parking, threatens Impark's longstanding reign as the undisputed king of the city's parking lots and parkades.

That's good news for local parking-facility owners and managers, who now have more options when choosing a firm to manage their facilities. And that could mean better prices and/or improved services if the bidding for management contracts gets aggressive.

But what it won't mean, industry officials said Friday, is cheaper parking rates for Winnipeg motorists.

They said supply and demand determine parking rates, and the supply of publicly accessible downtown parking spaces is expected to decline over the next few years, which likely means higher parking rates.

Real estate firm Colliers International issues a yearly report on parking rates in Canada, and the president of its Winnipeg office said a number of large surface parking lots in Winnipeg are expected to be redeveloped as part of the city's ongoing efforts to revitalize the downtown.

"The minute you start to take supply out of the inventory... the owners get to charge more," Wayne Pratt said. "So I think those stalls that are left behind are going to continue to go up in price."

Pratt said prices are already trending that way, noting the rates his firm pays at its downtown location have risen about 10 per cent over the last two years.

He and Colin Stewart, manager of special projects for the Winnipeg Parking Authority, said Winnipeg also enjoys some of the lowest parking rates of any major Canadian city. That's another reason why rates are more likely to go up than down.

"But we do hope customers will benefit from improved services," Stewart said.

He said large, international parking facility operators tend to be more willing to upgrade the properties they manage because they think it helps attract more customers.

"But the challenge they face in Winnipeg is that many owners here are still resistant to spending money on upgrades," he added.

Richard Wishnowski, manager of Vinci Park's new regional office in Winnipeg, confirmed Vinci Park hopes to establish a foothold in the Winnipeg market by offering a better level of service to both parking facility owners and customers.

Wishnowski, who was Impark's regional manager for seven years, said the Vancouver-based firm still has an estimated 85 per cent share of the local market, with about 150 to 155 parkades and parking lots.

He said Standard Parking has about 10 locations, and a third, locally owned player, Parking Plus, has 10 to 15.

Standard Parking recently scored a major coup by stealing away the Exchange District's 159-stall Bedford Parkade from Impark.

Pratt said it has also picked up several downtown surface parking lots.

A spokesman for Standard could not be reached for comment.

Ken Reiss, vice-president of Bedford Investments, the firm that owns the Bedford Parkade on King Street, declined to say why he switched to Standard from Impark.

But he said Impark still manages several of Bedford's other facilities in the city, and they still have a good

business relationship.

Impark spokesman Julian Jones said Impark isn't worried about the increased competition.

"We have a great relationship with both the business community and the community at large," Jones said. "So it's not something we're particularly concerned about. "We're confident in the product and services we offer."

murray.mcneill@freepress.mb.ca

Find this article at:

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/parking-lot-rivalry-heats-up-139145874.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.