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# Downtown Shark Club's first weekend sets record

## Calgary chain opens in cityplace

By: **Geoff Kirbyson**Posted: **1:00 AM** | Comments: **0g**

There has been a shark sighting downtown but it's not keeping people from going into cityplace.

The Shark Club, a Calgary-based sports-bar chain, has christened a 17,000-square-foot Winnipeg location and given a much-needed boost to a mall that has seen better days.

On one side is a high-end bar featuring well-groomed serving staff while the other hosts a gaming centre with six blackjack and poker tables and 140 slot machines.

"It's a no-brainer for us to be this close to a sports venue affiliated with True North (Sports & Entertainment)," said Darin Amies, franchisee for the Shark Club, motioning across the street to the MTS Centre, home to the Winnipeg Jets.

The opening weekend, which featured an Ultimate Fighting Championship card at the MTS Centre on Saturday, was the biggest in the firm's history. The gaming aspect is part of the provincial government's previously announced support for True North. The partnership between the owners of the Jets, the Shark Club and Manitoba Lotteries is designed to produce \$5.5 million in annual income.

Jim Ludlow, president and CEO of True North, said the new facility is a part of downtown's renaissance.

"We're always looking to expand the sports, hospitality and entertainment offerings for our fans. We think this is the perfect complement. We see it as being a wonderful pre- and post-game option and alternative for all of the fans who come into this district on an event night," he said.

The Shark Club's multimillion-dollar investment in Winnipeg is yet another sign of confidence in the downtown, said Ross McGowan, president of CentreVenture Development Corp., the downtown development agency.

"We're seeing a real resurgence of external interest, as expressed by national brands such as the Shark Club and Milestones, complementing local initiatives such as the Metropolitan (Entertainment Centre)," he said.

McGowan said the Shark Club is a "cutting-edge" contribution to the Sports Hospitality and Entertainment District (SHED), the kind of scale and class usually seen in cities such as New York, Chicago and Toronto.



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Jim Ludlow of True North says the Shark Club is an ideal fit for downtown. (MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)

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Franchise owner Darin Amies spiffies up the club's sign. (MIKE DEAL / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)

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"Now we're starting to see it here, done to the same level and standard. That attracts other types of similar development," he said.

Amies said the Shark Club was hesitant to move into the second floor of cityplace, which he described as an "unconventional site," in part because it's on the second floor and doesn't have street access.

"This was a dead mall. The owners (Manitoba Public Insurance) are committed to revitalizing it, but for years it was empty," he said.

Ludlow noted the MTS Centre has put on more than 1,200 events since it opened in 2004 and has welcomed more than 8.3 million fans.

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*-- Darin Amies, franchisee for the Shark Club*

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