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ALASKA ACES MOVING TO PORTLAND, MAINE

Comcast Spectacor, the parent company of the Philadelphia Flyers and Spectra, will bring hockey back to Portland, Maine, with the purchased Alaska Aces, an ECHL franchise. The Alaska Aces will be renamed and relocated to the Cross Insurance Arena to begin the 2018-19 season.

The Alaska Aces were founded in 1989 and played 28 seasons in Alaska. During that period, they won three ECHL's Kelly Cups. Comcast Spectacor purchased the team from a five-man local ownership group after it was known the Aces would not be back for the 2017-18 season. The team will switch coasts, leaving Sullivan Arena, Anchorage, Alaska, for their new home.

The last hockey team to call Cross Insurance Arena home was the Portland Pirates, whose residency lasted from 1993-2016. Prior to the Pirates arrival, Comcast Spectacor had its first amateur hockey team, the Maine Mariners, play at the location from 1977-1992, when the arena was known as Cumberland County Civic Center.

"We have a good relationship with the arena," said Paul Holmgren, president of the Philadelphia Flyers. "We manage that building. We have good partnerships with people in the area; we feel a real synergy with building the community, and we look forward to reigniting hockey in Portland."

The Cross Insurance Arena recently underwent a sizable renovation to create a better atmosphere for fans, create more comfort for athletes and a more desirable venue for entertainers. The 2014 renovation added 37,408 sq.-ft. of private suites, party rooms and larger state-of-the-art locker rooms for sports teams.

Cross Insurance Arena will also feature wider concourses, more vending stations, increased seating for handicapped patrons and advancements such as retractable telescopic seating, which will push the stage back to create more floor space for shows.

Many of the improvements to the arena were made with the fans in mind. However, the renovation would not be possible if it weren't for the citizens of Cumberland County.

"A question was put before the voters of the county (Cumberland County) and they, in fact, agreed," said Mitch Berkowitz, chairman of Cross Insurance Arena board of trustees. "They were willing to commit upwards of \$33 million of bonding capacity for the renovations of the facility.

"I think the stone has been dropped into a calm pond and the ripples instead of dissipating are getting bigger and bigger and bigger. By that I mean we expect great things that are going to come now that hockey has returned to the city of Portland," said Berkowitz.

The purchase of this ECHL franchise will contribute to tourism and destination vacations in Portland, which can create economic benefits for nearby hotels, restaurants and shopping outlets, he added.

The arena has also hosted a lot of sold-out concerts. "We do a good bit of ticketed shows, everything from the Disney Live and the Disney on Ice, all the way to Phish and James Taylor," said Matt Herpich, general manager of Cross Insurance Arena.

Cross Insurance Arena also hosts a number of collegiate sporting events involving the nearby University of Maine. National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) sporting events that have been held in Cross Insurance Arena include hockey, women's basketball and men's basketball games.

This ECHL franchise will play 36 home games at Cross Insurance Arena starting the 2018-2019 season, not including possible postseason games. Though a team name or team colors has not yet been determined, that decision will be made sooner than later.

Holmgren said the Flyers intend to hold a press conference later in July to talk about team details like name, colors and players.

Founding and building a new franchise will not be a new task for Comcast Spectacor, as they've been through this process with two American Hockey League (AHL) franchises, the Maine Mariners and the Philadelphia Phantoms.

Though this ECHL franchise will be a main focus of Comcast Spectacor, the company will still handle business operation for AHL's Hartford Wolf Pack, a franchise-owned affiliate of the New York Rangers. Comcast Spectacor has been involved with the Wolf Pack over the past four years. Comcast Spectacor also manages the Wolf Pack's home arena, Hartford (Conn.) XL Center.

Danny Briere, former long-time Philadelphia Flyer, will be in charge of the day-to-day operations as the team looks to hire a coaching staff, athletic trainers, sign players to contracts and find a National Hockey League (NHL) affiliate for the club. The franchise will not play its first game at Cross Insurance Arena until October 2018.