

MOOV-in' on up

BY PAUL DELEAN, THE GAZETTE NOVEMBER 19, 2009



Former Montreal Canadiens players Claude Lemieux (left) and teammate from the 1986 Stanley Cup champion Canadiens, Petr Svoboda, raise a glass of a beverage made from Moov frozen fruit. This was at a press conference announcing their involvement in a business partnership with a company called Moov Frozen Foods inc. in Montreal Thursday, November 19, 2009.

Photograph by: John Kenney, THE GAZETTE

MONTREAL They used to be teammates on the ice. Now they're partners in the frozen-food aisle.

Former Montreal Canadiens Claude Lemieux and Petr Svoboda are among the principal owners of a new locally-based company, MOOV Frozen Foods Inc., which is aiming to become a global supplier of frozen fruit and vegetables to retail stores. Its products already are available at IGA stores and some independent supermarkets in Quebec, and the company is projecting 2010 sales of more than \$30 million.

MOOV finally had its official launch yesterday in a Bell Centre restaurant. It got pushed back repeatedly because Lemieux kept making the cut in CBC-TV's weekly hockey-meets-figure skating showdown Battle Of The Blades, where he was paired with Shae-Lynn Bourne.

The duo got all the way to last weekend's final, ultimately finishing as runners-up to Jamie Salé and Craig Simpson.

"They were very different than we were. Jamie's a pairs skater, Shae-Lynn's an ice dancer. Also, we knew the west was more into voting than the east, and Jamie's from there," noted Lemieux, who called

the competition “a great experience.”

MOOV will be another experience altogether for the 44-year-old who played for the Canadiens from 1986 to 1990 and briefly came out of retirement last season to join the San Jose Sharks.

In addition to being a major investor, he's the company president for North America. Svoboda is the president for Europe while another partner, Platon Gavrielatos, a veteran of 25 years in the frozen-food business, serves as chairman of the board and chief executive officer.

Gavrielatos, 47, knew both players socially. Svoboda's brother Karel works at a hockey school he started on the West Island. Lemieux's son Christopher played on a midget team he owned (and that Karel coached), the Lac St. Louis Lions.

“I know the old saying is that friends should never go into business together, but we want to beat the odds and show it can be done,” said Lemieux, who now lives in Arizona but could return to Montreal, or move to Toronto, if his corporate workload demands it.

“I will be involved day-to-day with this venture,” he said. “We've got a team to put together. I didn't want to just lend my name to something where I wasn't involved.”

Svoboda, 43, originally from Czechoslovakia, lives in Montreal now but also works out of Los Angeles and Prague. He represents 14 professional hockey players as an agent and has real-estate interests.

“Platon first talked to me about this idea a couple of years ago,” he said, “and I got excited. It's a healthy product. This is going to be a lot of work but you've got to keep busy in life.”

MOOV will be jockeying for freezer space in grocery stores with competitors such as Europe's Best, a company Gavrielatos co-founded in 2003 and exited in 2007, but he's confident in its prospects. His Alasko Frozen Foods Inc. became Canada's largest importer of frozen foods and vegetables for the food-service industry, with annual sales of more than \$150 million.

“The market is so big in Canada, there's room for everybody,” he said.

pdelean@thegazette.canwest.com

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