



Self Storage and Hockey Rinks— Now *That's* Diversification

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

This is the story of two high school buddies who grew up as hockey nuts in Canada, just outside Toronto. The two stayed in touch and eventually decided to go into the self storage business together. Where would Arctic transplants do business? Southern Florida, of course—with 25 facilities branded Southern Self Storage.

As far as Peter Cowie is concerned, when he, like so many Canadians, decided to move to Florida to escape the cold of winters of the Great White North, he didn't have to leave hockey behind. Partner Bob McIntosh, who was captain of the Brown college team, not only keeps his love of hockey alive in south Florida, he still plays the game at a rink 15 miles from his office.

"Florida has two NHL teams and we have lots of Canadians in this area who support them," says Cowie. "Bob and I support the Florida Panthers just as much as we would the Toronto Maple Leafs. Canadians are all about hockey and you never lose your love for that, no matter where you live."

Cowie and McIntosh came to south Florida in the early 1980s intent upon trying the development business. They had purchased an office building, and the man they hired to run it suggested that they should consider self storage.

Sure enough, by the late 80s they were giving it a shot. It was the right time to enter this business.

"Bob and I were happy to get into self storage, because the development industry was just too up-and-down," Cowie says. "More than 30 years later, we're still business partners and still love hockey."

Cowie and McIntosh are driven to expand their self storage business and hope to acquire another 20 or so facilities. But they aren't so busy that they can't take some time to invest in their true love: They own and operate three ice rinks back in Canada, one in Windsor, another in London, Ontario, and the third in Cambridge, Ontario.

"If we've learned anything about running ice rinks it is that the men's hockey leagues are where the real money is at," laughs Cowie, who maintains dual U.S. and Canadian citizenships. "We make most of our money on the sales of Molson's, Labatt's and chicken wings."

So, if you happen to be in Florida and see a Zamboni driving down the road with Southern Self Storage emblazoned on the side, don't be alarmed. It's most likely Peter or Bob living the cold version of their North American Dream, in the Sunshine State. Not too bad, eh? ❖