

STARR:

She hopes to shine at Ontario Place

By JEFF ROSEN

PATRICIA Starr has no trouble admitting that the one thing she can't control at Ontario Place is the weather. However, even there, she isn't about to admit defeat.

Starr, well known for her extensive involvement in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, began tackling her latest challenge last June when Ontario Premier David Peterson asked her to take on the position of chairman of the board of the \$20-million tourist attraction.

At that time, Starr says she had no idea of the position's complexity. However, after many months on the job and countless hours of preparation, Starr expects to feel excited, ecstatic and confident when she walks into Ontario Place May 19 as it kicks off its eighteenth season.

At that time, visitors will notice some small changes that Starr has introduced to make Ontario Place the "fabulous" place she believes it can be.

There will be a one hundred-seat flat-top boat to take visitors from the entrance to the west side, an eighteen-hole mini golf course and a three-dimensional theatre.

In June, patrons visiting the waterfront attraction will be able to enjoy the Benson and Hedges fireworks competition, and a Chinese dragon race as well as the return of Israel Day on June 12.

There will be better access to the waterfront facility this year as the Toronto Transit Commission begins a bus route into Ontario Place. More parking spaces have also been made available due to an agreement with Exhibition Place to use its parking facilities.

These improvements are only the beginning, said the energetic Starr. At the end of this season, a review of food served at Ontario Place will be undertaken with plans to improve both quality and price.



Patricia Starr is chairman of Ontario Place. (Rough Layout photo)

Looking back over the years when she brought her five children to Ontario Place, Starr says that while she enjoyed walking around and visiting Children's Village, she always thought the food was "lousy."

Now in the position to do something about it, Starr wants Ontario Place to be a location where people can spend the day and have a "great lunch at a very reasonable price." Or if visitors

choose to have dinner, they should be able to do so in a dining-room setting. Whatever the meal, Starr stresses that it should be of the best quality.

Starr says Ontario Place will also be looking at making changes in the west pods. However, to do that will require a massive amount of money from the provincial government.



Looking beyond her domain, Starr says a monorail connecting the whole waterfront would be "very exciting." The often discussed proposal to amalgamate Ontario Place and Exhibition Place under one governing body is something that Starr also supports.

But would she like to run such an agency?

"I certainly would find it challenging," she says with her charismatic smile.

The word "challenge" is what makes this dynamic lady run. Starr says that it wasn't until after she became involved that the real extent of the difficulties became apparent.

"There simply was no balance between what was spent to promote and what was actually achieved. At some point you have to look at what your result is and say 'Maybe I'm not spending my money in the right place.' I think you have got a Peter Principle here — if people in decision-making spots have had no experience in making money or don't know how to run a business or just aren't entrepreneur types, they're not going to make decisions that are financially smart."

The first order of business was to get someone involved running the corporation on a day-to-day basis. And since she is never one to run from responsibility, Starr put her other commitments temporarily on the sidelines and plunged headlong into her job.

"People always ask me why I do all these things. They have no idea of what you learn. You can't buy experience like this. I am now literally coordinating the administration of a \$20-million facility which I had no clue about. I walked in cold, put together over one hundred permanent staff, seven hundred part-time staff and made decisions on how much to spend for everything."

This has not been accomplished without stepping on some toes, though. Starr says there was a lot of hostility on the part of the staff when she came in as her predecessor did not raise as many questions or interfere with the operations as much. While she could have done the same, Starr says it would not have been as much fun.

"I'm sure Premier Peterson looked into my background and knew I was an activist. With my history and reputation — which is pretty accurate — there is no question in anyone's mind that I would get involved.

"The government has been completely supportive since I've taken over. It has allowed us to go and encouraged us and we have created a lot of flak. I'm not afraid of taking a little flak though. Read anything about me and you've got flak. What I am learning is a little bit more restraint, more polish and to be less abrasive."

No free pass for sports fans

Her reputation aside, Starr said her decision to devote as much time as she has leaves no doubt as to who is in charge.

"If anything goes wrong it will be because of me. It will not be because of someone else. If this thing can't be done, I will know that I will have put every effort that I'm capable of into it."

Besides the added attractions, one of the things Starr has changed is the free

admission for baseball and football ticket-holders. Beginning this season, ticket holders will have to pay a one dollar admission and even that, Starr concedes, is not enough.

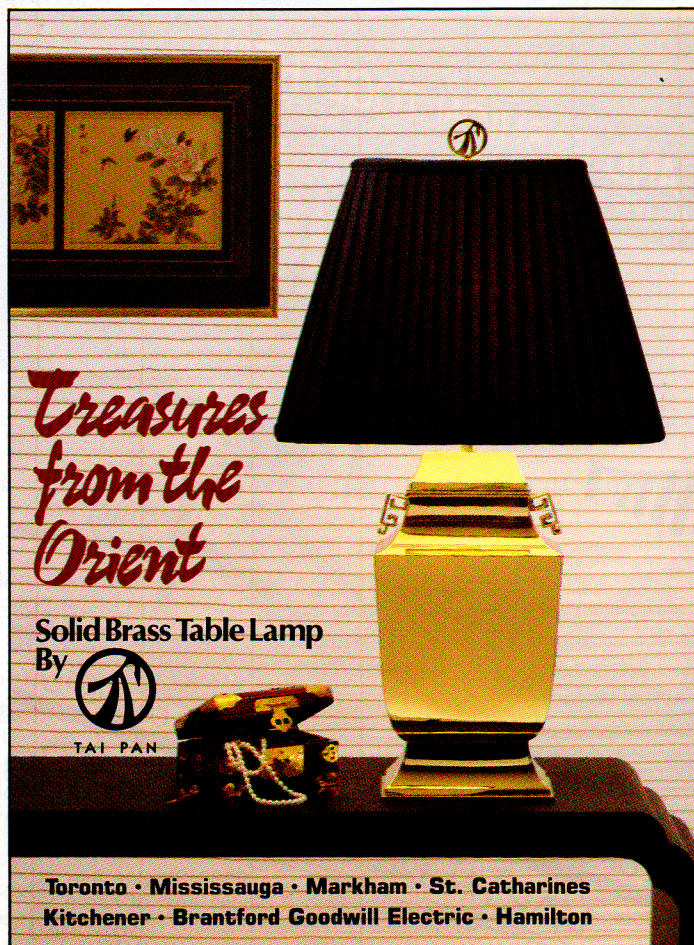
While this change may result in a decline in attendance, Starr says Ontario Place will survive without football or baseball patrons. She adds that because they enter the grounds for free, they won't change paid attendance figures at all.

She says that last season paid attendance figures increased by six percent over 1986 while overall attendance declined by two percent.

"You don't have to be a genius to figure that out," she said. "Attendance will go up from our projections this year unless it rains every day and, if it does, then attendance is out of our hands."

"I can't do anything about the rain," she added. "However, if there is a way, I'm going to figure out how."

Even if she is unable to control the elements, Starr says Ontario Place is ready with rainy-day programs which she plans on publicizing this year.



Treasures from the Orient

Solid Brass Table Lamp
By **TAI PAN**

TORONTO • MISSISSAUGA • MARKHAM • ST. CATHARINES
KITCHENER • BRANTFORD • GOODWILL ELECTRIC • HAMILTON

NOI NIN

ELECTRIC SUPPLY CO. LIMITED

Where Great Ideas come to Light!



Patricia Starr, seen in Ontario Place's Trillium Room, seeks to offer better and more reasonable food at the attraction. (Rough Layout photo)

As chairman, Starr is also involved in meeting with senior staff on a regular basis and reviewing the operational budget. She has also been meeting with corporate sponsors to try to change the terms of their contracts and get more money from them, which she describes as one of her greatest learning experiences.

However, she admits that the wheeling and dealing is what she does best. Operating from the premise that Ontario Place is the greatest place to be, Starr says that just because it is a government facility doesn't mean it has to be mediocre.

She applies the same principle to entertainment at Ontario Place. While not satisfied with what has been offered in the past, Starr says the Forum will be offering a couple of "big" name shows this season.

*Leaving post
won't be easy*

Despite the hectic schedule and increased workload, Starr knows it will probably come to an end in three years when her term expires. While admitting that she has no desire to leave until she sees her goals become a reality, she realizes she occupies a "rented chair" and serves at the pleasure of the government.

Still, it won't be easy. Recalling her decision not to take a second year as president of National Council of Jewish Women, Toronto Section, Starr says she found it an extremely traumatic time in her life and vowed at the time never to take another chairmanship or presidency again.

However, Starr lived to see another executive posting but admits that she will probably feel the same way when she leaves Ontario Place.

"I will probably get just as upset as I was and I'll say how can I give it up."

While that day will come and Starr will once again stroll through Ontario Place as an ordinary visitor, she says that hopefully what she leaves behind will be felt for many years and "it will be a long time before Ontario Place returns to where we found it." ■

FURNITURE AND FASHION TOGETHER!
ALL AT AN INNOVATIVE FINE FURNITURE AND ACCESSORIES SHOWROOM

OUR SPRING LINE OF UNIQUE ACCESSORIES ARE NOW ON DISPLAY

MARTIN DANIEL INTERIORS

2663 Steeles Ave. W.
2 blocks east of Keele St.
667-0080