

City of Penticton celebrates arrival of Western Hockey League

(Penticton, BC – March 24, 2025) –The Western Hockey League has arrived.

"We're thrilled with the announcement today that the Western Hockey League is bringing the top tier of junior hockey to Penticton," says Mayor Julius Bloomfield. "Our community has a long, proud hockey tradition and this represents the next chapter in our story. The WHL will bring excitement, excellence and economic activity to our town and we can't wait for the first training camp to open."

The Western Hockey League confirmed today the Penticton Vees have been accepted as the league's 23rd franchise and will begin play in the 2025/26 season. The Vees are the first expansion team in nearly two decades in the WHL, as the last expansion franchise was granted in 2006.

"This is an exciting day, as the Western Hockey League takes its next step as the world's finest development league for junior hockey players," commented WHL Commissioner Dan Near. "We are thrilled to welcome Graham Fraser and the entire Penticton Vees ownership group, along with Fred Harbinson. The WHL extends its gratitude to Mayor Julius Bloomfield and the City of Penticton, as well as Dean Clarke and Oak View Group Canada for their passion and drive to bring the WHL to the great community of Penticton."

The Vees junior hockey organization has a long history in Penticton, dating back to the creation of the Okanagan-Mainline Junior Hockey League in 1961. The Vees senior men's team won the 1955 World Hockey Championships.

"For fans, this is going to be an opportunity to see up-close some of the most talented players in the country," says Bloomfield. "It also will create significant economic activity for the community throughout the entire year. We want to thank the WHL and the Vees organization for seeing the potential in Penticton and making this happen."

The estimated economic impact of a WHL franchise, for a mid-market team, is approximately \$7.9 million in direct impact and \$14.9 million in indirect impact. The Vees will continue to play out of the 5,000 seat South Okanagan Events Centre.

"It's a very exciting time for our Community and Penticton Vees hockey team," says owner Graham Fraser. "We feel the city and hockey team are ready to take the next step and join the WHL. With our Coach, staff, and partners we will be in a great place to have continued success. Additionally, I would

like to thank our ownership group of Mark Scheifele, Mike Richter, Joe Walters, and Gord Kovacik for their support in making this a reality.”

“This is a monumental moment in our franchise’s history,” says Head Coach, Fred Harbinson. “Starting as an iconic senior team in the 1950’s, to being a premier Junior ‘A’ for the past 65 years. The move to the WHL is the next chapter in the legacy of hockey in Penticton.”

Tickets for the 2025/2026 go on sale soon. For more information, visit: Penticton.ca/vees.

To see the WHL release, [click here](#).

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