

Polehna envisions sports dome for C.R.

Written by Jim Ecker

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Tom Polehna has lived in Cedar Rapids all his life and is acutely aware of how much the city needs an indoor sports facility for people of all ages to use, especially during the winter when it's too cold to exercise outdoors.

He has a big dream of doing something about it.

Polehna, 57, is trying to drum up local interest in installing a domed fabric structure on the site of the old Farmstead Foods plant in southeast Cedar Rapids along the Cedar River.

He's collected information from a company called [Yeadon Air-Supported Structures](#), which is located in St. Paul, Minn., and has more than 30 years' experience in building sports and recreation domes.

Polehna figures it would cost approximately \$5 million to acquire a sports dome for Cedar Rapids and thinks it would be well worth the money. He thinks it would be a terrific investment for youth teams that are always looking for an indoor facility.

"We don't have space for all these kids," he said. "We need some place in the winter for them to practice. And it's not just for the kids. Adults could use it, too."

"I think we need to do something for the community that everybody could use."

Yeadon Air-Supported Structures has installed domes all over the country. The [University of Texas has a Yeadon football dome.](#)

Arizona State University has a Multi-Sport Dome from Yeadon. There is a Golden Bear Dome in Syracuse, N.Y., and other Yeadon domes in Alaska, Washington and parts of Canada. Yeadon has installed more than 100 of these domes, according to the company website.

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The St. Croix Valley Rec Center in Stillwater, Minn., has a Yeadon dome that is projected to turn a profit in 2013 through user fees and other revenue sources.

"I saw the one in Stillwater and I know how it gets used," said Polehna, a 1973 Cedar Rapids Jefferson High School graduate who works at the ADM plant in Cedar Rapids. "These things make money."

A sports and recreation dome could be used for a variety of activities, ranging from baseball and softball practices to walking trails for adults. There are Yeadon domes that cover tennis courts, a swimming pool, indoor golf, biking, gymnastics, soccer, lacrosse, hockey, and track and field.

"Who couldn't use it?" Polehna noted.

There are two basic sizes for the fabric domes. They can be 380 feet by 240 feet or 360 feet by 210 feet, although the University of Texas football dome is 384 feet long, 184 feet wide and 55 feet high.

The domes can be used during the winter and taken down, or they can remain in place for the entire year.

Polehna would like to put a group together that's composed of representatives from city government, the Cedar Rapids Community School District, Coe College, Mount Mercy University, Kirkwood Community College, the hospitals, business leaders and anyone else who may be interested.

He's already spoken with an architect and is reaching out to the community. "I have to start making phone calls," he said Monday.

Polehna said it probably would take about five or six acres for the dome in southeast Cedar Rapids. He wants to move quickly, fearing a proposed casino may be in competition for the

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same land.

"We need to get in there and get our hat in the ring before that (a casino) gets finalized," he said.

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