

Log house has non-stop traffic

by Kathy Michaels
Free Press staff

B.C.-Canada Place is the surprise hit of the winter Olympics, and hoards of people are queuing up to see the building from the South Cariboo.

"When it first opened to the public, we were amazed that they had 1,500 people on the weekends and 400 a day," John Johnson, co-owner of Sitka Log Homes, said. "And now, hundreds of people are lined up outside to go in."

In fact, numbers of those who are making their way to the house have more than quadrupled as the government recently released information saying B.C.-Canada Place welcomed a record 7,500 visitors Sunday, Feb. 19 alone. By that Sunday, more than 75,000 visitors have toured the house.

"The house is packed, and they are even viewing the storage room," Johnson said.

He noted that well-known Canadian broadcaster Vicky Gabereau is writing a blog from Torino.

"I have gone to the streets, because there is no more room in Canada Place to do my interviews," she wrote.

But, sheer numbers alone aren't what's making the locale over-run. The log building is getting international attention and is also providing visitors with a little spiritual sustenance.

"We are getting compliments daily from people in Torino," Johnson said.

Government members, celebrities and athletes have made their way through the little log building that could.

Johnson said Wayne Gretzky and Tom Green, working for Jay Leno's Tonight Show, have even



Submitted photo (D)

The large courtyard behind the log house is home to daily games of ball hockey.

made their way through the building.

"It's the thing to do in Torino, apparently," Johnson said.

After the games, the building will be moved to an art park for the entrance structure, although there is a lobby of people asking for it to stay at the piazza.

Johnson said the company will be invited over when it's time to move the building.

Part of the building's appeal is that its beauty is rooted in nature.

"When we built some projects for the Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002, we incorporated some huge logs," Johnson said.

"And I noticed that people would go past millions of dollars of fixtures only to hug this one log. So I wanted to create the same awe in Torino."

It's a feat they seem

to have accomplished with the 40-inch diameter cedar post in the middle of the building.

"This has become such an attraction because one of the house hosts called it a 'spirit log' and now one of things to do is to come to B.C.-Canada Place and feel the spirit of B.C.," he said. "So there are tourists and athletes alike coming to touch the spirit log, and they are getting all warm and fuzzy about it. It's pretty cool."

For another touch of Canadiana, people are playing street hockey in the courtyard outside the log house.

Johnson said the word from Torino is that people come into the building everyday and ask how they can book a trip to B.C. because it looks "so exciting."

"I think because

Europeans in general like the connection with nature and have a love for Canada," he said.

Johnson said that public reaction has been rewarding and that locals are coming to him to say they feel more connected to the Olympics because of the 100 Mile connection.

"We are pretty happy with how it turned out," he said. "We knew it would be a success, but both us and the government never thought it would be like this."