

# CFL to hold its Hall of Fame festivities in Winnipeg this year

Judy Owen, THE CANADIAN PRESS

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CFL Hall of Fame players Joe Poplawski (left), Paul Bennett, and James Murphy were in Winnipeg Wednesday afternoon to announce that the Canadian Football Hall of Fame induction weekend will be held in the city this September. (JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS)

WINNIPEG - The Canadian Football Hall of Fame is taking its show on the road for only the second time in 39 years.

Organizers of the induction weekend announced Wednesday that this year's events will be held in Winnipeg from Sept. 24-26. The only other time it wasn't held at the Hall's home in Hamilton was 2003 in Calgary. Hall executives were reluctant to move the festivities. But organizing committee chair Paul Bennett believes it will help fans across the country share in the weekend.

"If you can create the energy that I think that were going to create here, it only makes sense to move it around," said Bennett, who was inducted into the Hall in 2002. "When you see the event, its cool. Yeah, I was a part of it so for me it's a little bit more emotionally, but fans have huge emotion and they're going to be able to make that connection.

"Just move it around, move it around. The Hall will always be in Hamilton for the foreseeable future and that's fine by me, but I think we need to share all the things you're going to experience here in September." He'd like to see the event held in Saskatchewan next year, when the Roughriders will be celebrating their 100th year.

This year's inductees will be announced April 7. There are more than 200 members of the Hall, including last year's class of players - John Bonk, Mike (Pinball) Clemons, Doug Flutie, Mike Pringle and builder Tom Shepherd.

The events in Winnipeg will begin Sept. 24 with a golf tournament featuring the new inductees and Blue Bombers alumni such as receivers Joe Poplawski and James Murphy, who were on hand for Wednesday's announcement.

A breakfast the next day will be followed up by the unveiling of the busts of the new inductees in the afternoon and a dinner in the evening.

The tribute game is Sept. 26 between the Bombers and Toronto Argonauts.

"The Canadian Football Hall of Fame belongs to Canadians and this is a great initiative by the Hall to reach out to Canadians and the people that haven't experienced it," said Blue Bombers president and CEO Lyle Bauer. "This initiative is part of a new direction for the Hall and I think it is part of the new mandate to have the Hall become important to all Canadians."

The access fans are given to players will help raise the profile of the league, according to Bauer.

"You get the new class and you get all the other greats along with it, and it's quite a walk down memory lane for many fans who have been around for many years and its also creating new memories for our younger fans."

It was Bennett who came up with the idea of moving the event to Winnipeg this year. The former Toronto, Winnipeg and Hamilton defensive back said his induction is a memory he'll cherish for many reasons.

"For me, being inducted into the Hall was a justification for all my sacrifices, for all the times being traded, for all the abuse you took - your body, emotional, being cut, being traded," he said.

"It was, hey, you know what, I did what was right by me and people finally saw that as worthwhile and worthy of being put in the Hall."

Some of the profits from the events will go to local charities.

Notes: Even though Blue Bombers receiver Milt Stegall retired this year as the CFL's all-time touchdown and receiving yardage leader, Bennett said he'll have to wait the required three years before he's inducted into the Hall. The Bombers have already announced Stegall is going into the club's Hall of Fame this year.