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UPMC Health Plan, Chiefs agree to sponsorship deal

BY MIKE MASTOVICH

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The Cambria County War Memorial Arena ice is the same, but the playing surface now has a name.

The ECHL's Johnstown Chiefs announced a major sponsorship with UPMC Health Plan on Thursday at the War Memorial.

The arena's playing surface will be named UPMC Health Plan Ice Rink at Cambria County War Memorial Arena. UPMC Health Plan has an office in Richland Township and its name will be painted on the face-off circle at center ice.

"It's one of our biggest sponsorships ever," said Chiefs Vice President Kevin McGeehan during a news conference at the arena.

"It's great when a local sponsor steps up and supports the team like this. We're always looking to find new ways to create more sponsorship and advertising."

McGeehan said the sponsorship only applies to the rink's playing surface during hockey games and has no bearing on the War Memorial Arena's name.

"We're pleased to partner with a class organization like the Chiefs," said UPMC Health Plan sales executive Rick Cosgrove of Johnstown. "All of us in our local office are residents and natives of Johnstown. We're familiar with the hockey tradition that we have here."

Chiefs majority owner Neil Smith, minority owner Ned Nakles and new coach Ian Herbers attended the news conference.

Smith initially bought the Chiefs in 2002 but had moved into the background the past two seasons when Lancaster businessman Jim Weber operated the team. Weber unexpectedly left the ownership group on July 5 and Smith took control of 90 percent of the Chiefs.

"The local fans have to be given a lot of praise for the support they've given the team," Smith said.

"When you have a surprise like we had this summer when the operator decided not to operate anymore, it leads people to be skeptical about what's going to happen to our team," Smith said.

"I'm proud that we as a staff have been able to quickly get it into gear. We made some changes. We didn't panic. The staff, with Kevin McGeehan, was able to accelerate and not decelerate when that change occurred. The staff didn't look to go somewhere else. They kept doing their jobs faithfully and showed their dedication to the franchise."