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Agway Metals Case Study | LAROCK PICKLEBALL COURT, ON

Back in the fall of 2022, Natasha Larock caught the Pickleball bug. “I first tried it a couple of years ago, and I was immediately hooked,” she says. “She’s totally obsessed,” husband Gordon laughs.

Like many, Natasha was attracted to the nature of the sport: a hybrid of tennis, badminton, and ping-pong whose popularity is sweeping across North America. Using a wiffle ball makes Pickleball “slower” than tennis, but that doesn’t mean it’s any less competitive or active, Natasha notes. “It’s a real workout!” she says.

There’s just one real problem Natasha faced: she and her husband live in Bracebridge, a town two hours north of Toronto that serves as the gateway to Muskoka, the popular cottage country. Living in a small town has its advantages, the Larocks say, but amenities aren’t one of them: Bracebridge has four public Pickleball courts, but they’re all outside courts that get shut down when it snows.

And it snows a lot in Bracebridge.

Unable to accept months without playing their favourite sport, the Larocks put their heads – and their experience in the construction industry – together and came up with a solution: if outdoor courts wouldn’t work, then an indoor court would have to do.

The Larocks decided to build a personal, indoor Pickleball court, nestled into the woods behind their home. “At first we were just thinking of putting in a court of our own,” Gordon says. “But then a friend suggested that we put a building over top of it. I didn’t know we could do that!”

Taking advantage of building codes, the Larocks built a 70’ long, 35’ wide, and 23’ tall building, with a single-slope roof, all made of steel. “It looks like we added a second house,” jokes Gordon. “But honestly, I thought it would be bigger.”



Gordon, who's semi-retired from the construction industry, knew that steel was the only material that made sense for the project. "It's light, it's strong, and it's not as expensive as other materials," he says. "It can handle the snow and weather, too."

That's a sentiment that is shared by Dave Simmons, a Project Manager and Coordinator at Prestige Steel, who made their Pickleball court dreams a reality. Simmons points out the obvious: "You can't have load-bearing columns in the middle of a court," he says. When dealing with long spans, steel makes the most sense for materials. "You really need to rely on its strength," Simmons notes. "Especially when you also get two feet of snow all at once."

The Larock's Pickleball court is more than just a court, though: the Larocks also threw in a golf simulator and a basketball hoop ("Those were to get me on board," jokes Gordon). But the unique space wasn't a challenge for Simmons. Specializing in pre-fab buildings in cottage country means having to produce everything from boathouses to bunkies.

While garages and workshops are more Prestige Steel's bread and butter, Simmons pushes back on the "pre-fab" label's implications. "Every building is unique," he says emphatically. "Every project is different. We don't have a list of like, different sizes and styles on our website that you can just order."

Once again, it's the versatility of steel that makes Simmons' job simple. "With steel, we can do cladding, we can do different sizes, we can put all of the pieces together really easily," Simmons says. "We can use base designs and styles and tweak them for each specific case. And that's due to the versatility of the material."

Gordon and Natasha had a specific vision for their personal Pickleball hall. "We were conscious of our neighbours," Natasha says. "We didn't want to have it be too noisy or too much of an eyesore."

"We also were thinking of resale value," Gordon adds. "So, if the next people aren't into Pickleball – heaven forbid – it can be converted into a garage."



The Larocks worked with Simmons to design their dream personal court. The exterior structure includes big doors and windows that can also be opened up during the summer for fresh air and a nice breeze. And for the winter – the entire impetus for the project – the walls are stuffed with R30 insulation sandwiched between corrugated steel cladding. The exterior of the building is charcoal-grey, allowing it to recede into the surrounding trees ("We were pretty particular about colour," says Gordon). And the single-slope roof gives lots of space for interior sport activities while keeping the silhouette clean and modern.

There was another major factor to the construction project: time. While the project's scale wasn't anywhere near some of our other Steel Design articles, time was still a major consideration. "Between the snow, frozen ground,



PROJECT

Larock Pickleball Court

DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION

Prestige Steel Buildings

AGWAY PRODUCTS USED

7/8" Corrugated

Colour: Charcoal

and mud, we have a short construction season in Bracebridge,” explains Gordon. “We’re limited to a few summer months to do all the work.”

What kind of work? “We had to take down around 70 trees and do a bit of excavation, and bring in soil, to get everything up to grade,” says Simmons. Site preparation started in early May, with foundation going in by mid-June. By September, the Larocks had a finished, weather-proof Pickleball court.

“I was amazed at how quickly everything came together,” Gordon says. “We started having conversations about this in November, and we had the finished building by September. How many big renovations can you say that about?”

And while Gordon was impressed by the speed, Simmons says they could have gotten the project done even faster. “About 4 or 5 weeks faster,” Simmons says, “if the weather had totally cooperated.”

The speed was due to experience in pre-fab construction and planning experience, both of which were tailored to using steel. “We could do a lot of the preparation off-site,” Simmons says, “thanks to using steel. It makes it easy to create good plans.”

Now, the Larocks are a few months into having a completed backyard oasis, one that Natasha is constantly using. “Having a place to still be active while there’s two feet of snow outside is amazing,” she says. “I love that we could make this a reality.”

When asked if he’s planning on adding a Pickleball court to his own backyard now that he knows it’s possible, Simmons just grins. “I don’t know how you could look at that set-up and not be envious,” he chuckles. “It’s a really, really cool little building. We’re proud to have worked on it.”

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