Even in the warm summer months in this suburb along Lake Erie, winter sports take center stage. In any given week, the NHL-size rinks at Northtown Center host dozens of amateur and professional hockey games. On the other side of the 185,000 square-foot facility, a pair of larger ice sheets are frequented by figure skaters with Olympic-size ambitions.

However, for the community’s public works department, the price tag for that success was the staggering monthly power bill for illuminating four large rinks with 1,000-watt metal halide lamps. So, after completing a similar sports lighting retrofit project at nearby Niagara University, sales representative Tom Meidenbauer of VBC Lighting in Buffalo decided to pitch the Northtown facility manager on a more cost-effective approach.

“I knew Eric (Guzdek) had heard feedback that the Buffalo Sabres were happy with the lighting improvements at the university, since they practice there,” Meidenbauer said. “So when I called and told him we had specified H.E. Williams products for that job, he said, ‘I want to talk with you. How soon can you get here?’”

While cost reduction was a key consideration for Northtown Center, product reliability and top-notch lighting quality were also important goals. For those reasons, Meidenbauer recommended the Williams GL fluorescent luminaire, which would deliver brighter illumination while substantially cutting power use. As an added bonus, the Williams GL offered instant on/off capability – a significant advantage over the existing HID fixtures. To prove his case, Meidenbauer arranged for a test install of four GL luminaries in one Northtown Center rink.

“During that review process, Eric got instant compliments from coaches and even his own work crews on how clean and even the lighting appeared,” Meidenbauer said.

Once Amherst officials signed off on the project, work began to meet each rink’s specific needs. For the 200’x 85’ NHL-size rinks, where hockey is the main priority, it was important to have crisp, even lighting along the main ice surfaces and dasher boards. To accomplish that goal, Meidenbauer recommended a one-for-one swap of the old metal halide lamps with a combination of eight-lamp and 10-lamp Williams GL fixtures. That change delivered 80 footcandles of illumination output on the ice, while cutting energy use by almost 50 percent.

Meanwhile, in the larger Olympic-sized ice sheets where figure skating judges and spectators had seating closer to the action, the priority was to improve light levels and enhance the overall experience. By installing a second combination of Williams GL luminaires, lighting levels in these rinks approached 100 maintained footcandles.
Because of the substantial energy savings delivered by the Williams GL fixtures, this project qualified for nearly $180,000 in grant funding from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). As an added bonus, the re-lamping project also included an advanced building automation system, which allowed Northtown Center staff to control key operational features – including lighting – either onsite or via remote access from anywhere in the world.

Based on over 20 hours of lighting use at the Northtown Center each day, the city of Amherst is expected to recover the cost of its Williams lighting investment within one year. Meidenbauer says that quick payback, together with new lighting that has been well-received, has led to more opportunities to shine.

“The town has been happy enough with this project that, with some money left over in their budget, they brought us in again to specify H.E. Williams products for a pair of their smaller community recreation centers,” he said.