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Wednesday, December 21, 2005



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## Will Pittsburgh become the next Hartford?

By [Andrew Johnson](#)  
 TRIBUNE-REVIEW  
 Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Stung by the chatter of moving the Penguins to the land of barbecue - Kansas City -- a "Save the Pens" rally unfolded before Friday's game outside of Mellon Arena.

Local hockey fans are preparing for the worst.

"It would have an impact economically," said Jeff Montgomery, a 32-year-old chemist and Penguins fan. Montgomery said that he'll feel even worse. "I'll be hurt," he said.

Earlier this month, Mario Lemieux expressed doubts the team will remain in Pittsburgh after 2007 because of the lack of public help in financing a new arena. Lemieux said the team probably has run out of time to find a way to stay.

### Where are they now?

Cities that lost NHL franchises:

**Minnesota North Stars, 1967-1993**

**Colors:** Green, Yellow

**Memorable moments:**  
 Losing to the Penguins in six games in the 1991 Stanley Cup Finals

**Moved to:** Dallas. NHL returned to the Twin Cities in 2000 with the Wild.

**Atlanta Flames, 1972-1980**

**Colors:** Red, White, Yellow

**Memorable moments:**  
 Memorable?

**Moved to:** Calgary, Alberta. NHL returned to Atlanta in 1999 with the Thrashers.

**California Golden Seals, 1967-1976**

**Colors:** Green, Yellow, White

**Memorable moments:**  
 Changing names mid-season of inaugural year (to Oakland Seals). Wearing yellow skates in 1970. Wearing white skates in 1971.

**Moved to:** Cleveland, where they became the Barons; then merged with the Minnesota North Stars. NHL returned to Bay Area in 1991 with the San Jose Sharks.

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It would hardly be the first time that an NHL team packed up their dank, oversized hockey bags and changed addresses.

It's happened a lot -- 19 times in National Hockey League history -- and it last happened in Hartford, Conn., eight years ago.

Hartford economic leaders said that the loss of the Whalers did not hurt badly, and may have, in fact, provided the spark for a recovery that it is still continuing to this day.

Michael Kintner, executive director of the Hartford Image Project, a marketing group, said much more money is flowing into Hartford now, since the Whalers left. Kintner said in the last four years, roughly \$750 million has pored into the depressed state capital, long known for crime and poverty, and another \$2.2 billion has come in from



private developers.

There are 1,400 new apartments and condos built in downtown Hartford alone, Kintner said.

Some don't see it as coincidence that a major reinvestment in Hartford coincided with the loss of its only professional sports franchise.

H. Scott Phelps, president of the Greater Hartford Convention & Visitors Center, said despair about the Whalers' move awoke everyone in the state.

"We can thank (Hartford Whalers owner Peter) Karmanos for leading downtown Hartford to a renaissance," Phelps said.

Because of the NHL lockout last year, Pittsburgh already has experienced the economic impact of a lost hockey season. The Greater Pittsburgh Convention & Visitors Bureau estimated the lockout cost Pittsburgh \$48 million. A Carnegie Mellon University study figured the Penguins' yearly financial impact at \$104.4 million.

Mark K. McGovern, director of Hartford's economic development division, said the loss of the Whalers actually galvanized the region. One project has fed off of another, since that time, he said.

The city recently opened a 540,000-square-foot Connecticut Convention Center, added a 22-story \$77 million Hartford Marriott Downtown, and completed a \$31 million Hilton Hartford hotel renovation. The city now has a Division 1 college football stadium, across the river in East Hartford, Rentschler Field, where the University of Connecticut men's football team plays. The city will soon have a new science center.

There is still hockey in Hartford (the New York Rangers' AHL farm team replaced the Whalers), but sports fans have turned their attention mostly to the highly successful University of Connecticut men's and women's basketball teams, Kintner said.

"You can't get into the Civic Center for men's and women's games," Kintner said.

Fred V. Carstensen, director of the university's Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis, said it is difficult to accurately say what professional hockey means to any region, economically.

Carstensen said when it comes to any professional sport, there's a bigger question of, "How much do they contribute to the reputation of an area?"

MetroHartford Alliance spokeswoman Marie Bonelli said the death of the Whalers initially meant "feelings of rejection" and thoughts of "What is wrong with us?"

Those feelings, less tangible than dollars, are real, said Ron Dresner, 45, of Farmington, Conn.

Dresner attended the first and last Whalers games at The Hartford Civic Center, 22 years apart.

The emotional toll of the loss was devastating, he said.

"I gave up being a fan," said Dresner, of the NHL, period, when his Whalers left.

If the Penguins do move, Dresner warned Western Pennsylvania hockey fans, "You're going to feel like you're losing a part of yourself."

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#### Colorado Rockies, 1976-1982

**Colors:** Blue, Red, Yellow, White

**Memorable moments:** The cool logo they wore when they took the ice.

**Moved to:** New Jersey, where they became the Devils. NHL returned to Denver in 1995 with the Avalanche.

#### Quebec Nordiques, 1972-1995

**Colors:** Blue, White, Red

**Memorable moments:** First-round pick Eric Lindros refusing to play for French-speaking perennially losing NHL outpost in 1991.

**Moved to:** Denver, where they became the Colorado Avalanche.

#### Winnipeg Jets, 1972-1996

**Colors:** Blue, White, Red

**Memorable moments:** Losing to the Edmonton Oilers in the Stanley Cup playoffs, blowing 3-1 leads.

**Moved to:** Phoenix, became the Coyotes.

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