

News

BIZ EXTRA: Gore keeps Wimbledon dry and on time

Print Page

Fabric roof keeps water out, lets light in

By Cheryl Mattix
cmattix@cecilwhig.com

Published: Tuesday, May 26, 2009 8:15 PM CDT

W.L. Gore & Associates added another trademark for use in high profile products worldwide May 17 when its GORE TENARA architectural fabric covered Wimbledon's famous Centre Court for the first time.

Thomas Kelmartin, Gore product specialist who works at the Appleton South site in Elkton, was among 15,000 patrons who witnessed the Centre Court celebration when Andre Agassi, Steffi Graf, Tim Henman and Kim Clijsters played tennis under the new retractable roof.

"We're extremely honored that our fabric is part of this structure," Kelmartin said. "This roof represents one of the biggest architectural changes ever to take place at Centre Court."

The All England Lawn Tennis & Croquet Club, which owns Wimbledon, ordered the retractable roof in 2005, in hopes of preventing the nagging rain delays that have interrupted play at Wimbledon for years.

"It's been a very challenging, but rewarding project to work on," said Kelmartin who has been overseeing the development of this project.

"It's the perfect application for this fabric," he said. GORE TENARA is strong, flexible, blocks out rain but not sunlight, which Kelmartin says gives the same effect as being outdoors.

The roof structure was designed by a British architectural firm HOK and built by a British contractor Galliford Try.

It is composed of about 56,000 square feet of GORE TENARA fabric and is supported by 10 steel trusses, the structure spans 252 feet and is positioned 52 feet above the lawn.

Kelmartin says it takes about eight minutes to deploy the roof and protect patrons, players and television crews from unpredictable summer rains.

It takes another 30 minutes to stabilize the interior climate with a newly installed air cooling and ventilating system.

Kelmartin said the May 17 event was the true test to be sure all systems are perfect before the 2009 Wimbledon is played June 22 through July 5.

Kelmartin said Gore started the TENARA product in 2001, but didn't introduce it until 2003 and started selling it in 2004.

"This is the biggest project to date for this fabric," said Kelmartin, who says the fabric has been used in entertainment complexes, historic buildings, tourist attractions and other uses.

This Gore fabric is made from high-strength fibers known as PTFE, but it is not the same type of fabric used in GORE-TEX outerwear. A Gore spokesman said they are both waterproof, but also have their own unique qualities.



Steffi Graf and Kim Clijsters compete under the new fabric roof at Wimbledon's Centre Court. W.L. Gore Product Specialist Thomas Kelmartin, who works in the company's Appleton South site in Elkton, led the project that created the fabric. PHOTO COURTESY OF W.L. GORE