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Volunteers make outdoor rinks possible

TERENCE LEUNG
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There's no fancy Zamboni, score clock or bleachers but the hilltop Ramsay outdoor rink embodies the spirit of outdoor skating and hockey.

It's a popular hangout for ice skaters as well as would-be or never-was Sidney Crosbys that is run successfully on a shoestring budget and a handful of dedicated volunteers.

"It was kind of run down when we took it over about 10 years ago," said David Graham, director, Winter Sports of Ramsay Community Association. "We fixed the broken lights, the boards, put up a tarp and made it a place for people to play."

Graham is one of 10 volunteers put on a weekly schedule to ensure the rink is properly flooded, maintained and cleaned of debris. It's a time commitment of about four hours per week but Graham feels it is worth it to provide his two children with a place to play and also the community with a little bit of liveliness.

"It's a great asset to the community. It's central and a gathering point. This area is dark during the winter and when the facility is all lit up and you hear the sounds of hockey coming out from there it's vibrant and attractive," says Graham of the roofed rink on top of Scotsman Hill. The facility is only one of two roofed outdoor rinks in Calgary. It is also one of over 50 outdoor rinks in the city.

"You can see the lights going and people

skating about. My kids are in hockey and it's great for them to play and get some exercise."

Ice time typically runs from the first long cold spell in December until the end of February. With help from an electrician in the community, the rink's lights are set on a timer to run from 5 p.m. to 11:45 p.m.

"We get people all over the city who come here to play. It's a full ice surface and the cost is not that much once you get it going," says Graham.

As opposed to multi-million dollar indoor rink facilities, Graham says the yearly cost of running the rink is about \$5,000 with the majority of that amount going to electricity bills for the lights and heat to the shack near the rink.

Much of the cost has been recouped from rink rentals running at \$50 per 90 minutes of use. Of course, non-scheduled pickup hockey is free. Once winter passes and the weather warms, the area is used for community events.

"Ramsay and the inner city has a massive void of rinks so it provides one (for them). I think outdoor rinks are good for the kids and it brings communities together. It's unique that it's covered and that protects from the sun to provide some cover from the elements," said Judy Hellevang, president of the Ramsay Community Association.

The rink, constructed in 1977 with the Centennial Funds program as part of Canada's 100-year celebrations, may see a facelift with a refrigeration system for the ice when temperatures rise, new puck



David Graham has been maintaining the Ramsay outdoor rink for about the past 10 years. It is only one of two roofed outdoor rinks in Calgary.

Photo by Terence Leung

boards to replace the worn wood boards, an ice re-surfacer, roof repair and installation of security lighting.

The proposed additions will give the rink five months of use per year and also a greater chance for Ramsay or other communities to rent the facility.

Hellevang believes the success of the facility is primarily due to the dedicated team of volunteers the community has.

"Actions speak louder than words. The volunteers wouldn't do it if it's not worth it.

I think if you paid the volunteers it would be pretty expensive."

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Community Profile: Highwood

The community of Highwood is located in the northwest sector of the city.

It is bounded by McKnight Boulevard to the north, Fourth Street NW to the east, 40th Avenue NW to the south, and John Laurie Boulevard to the west.

The gently rolling foothills in the community provide for views at a number of locations within Highwood.

The community is home to several groups, including Scouts, Guides, Block-watch and a Boys and Girls Club.

This predominantly single family residential neighbourhood was established in 1954.

Highwood residents are provided with easy access to outdoor recreation opportunities such as Confederation Park, Nose Hill Park, and the pathway.

Schools

- Colonel Irvine Junior High School - Public
- Highwood Bilingual Elementary School - Public

Demographics

Located in Ward 4, Highwood has a population of 2,152 (2006 Civic Census) with approximately 15.2% comprising the immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada).

A total of 350 families accounted for 565 children still living at home with 40.7% of these being six to 14 years old.

According to Stats Canada, 2001 Census of Canada the median household income for Highwood in 2000 was \$57,663.

In addition, 57.4% of the population over

20 completed college, attended university or graduated university with a degree - an additional 13.4% graduated from trade schools (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada).

There are a total of 935 occupied private dwellings in Highwood with 73.3% being single detached dwellings (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada).

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WHAT DOES community MEAN TO YOU?

"Community is about neighbours working together on projects and activities that benefit the whole community."

Bob Lang, President
Federation of Calgary Communities

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