



Freeze Frame: How an Outdoor Ice Rink is Made

Ever wonder what goes into the making of a public outdoor ice rink? For starters, it requires the right ingredients, Mother Nature's cooperation, skilled staff and lots of patience.

Take the rinks at Newton Park in Glen Ellyn, for example. The process begins with preparation of the areas targeted for rinks. The same ground that serves as tennis courts and football fields in the summer is transformed into rinks for skating and playing hockey during winter.

Because the ground is not level, staff must take the pitch into account and make adjustments to create rinks that are level. After building and positioning the frame for the rink, staff monitors the ground to determine whether it is frozen enough to hold ice, and checks for optimum air temperatures, which are 13-17 degrees Fahrenheit for at least three consecutive days.

Once temps are deemed appropriate, the next step is making the ice. Under ideal conditions, this step begins about 10 pm and proceeds for two eight-hour shifts a day for four days, provided the sub-freezing temperatures hold. Working overnight when there is no sun and temperatures are at their lowest is the quickest way to freeze water. Still, the process is slow as the water is between 45-50 degrees Fahrenheit and must be frozen one thin layer at a time to create quality ice that is safe for skating.

"The technique we use is to spray the water upward into the frigid air in a side-to-side motion to make it cooler before it hits the ground," said Dave Scarmardo, Superintendent of Parks. "This helps speed up the process."

Once a thin layer of water has been applied to the entire grass or asphalt rink area, it can take up to 30 minutes to freeze. After the layer is frozen, staff removes ice chunks and rough areas before beginning a new layer, repeating the process until an optimum level of seven inches of ice is built.

Of course, the weather isn't always so cooperative. Rinks subjected to rainstorms and bouts of warmer temperatures melt and have to be re-created.

"We just monitor the weather and start all over again when that happens," Scarmardo said. "Outdoor ice skating is really popular in Glen Ellyn so it's important that we're out there making ice and maintaining it every winter."