

Tuesday January 15, 2008

## Recreation programs on life support

OURVIEW

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In 2003, Idaho Falls voters rejected -- by 80 percent -- raising property taxes to generate \$8.7 million toward a new recreation center.

That flawed proposal's demise did not eliminate the community's need for new facilities.

The city has the soccer and baseball fields necessary to satisfy most demands. But indoor recreation is on life support.



Built in 1938, the Recreation Center on Memorial Drive offers a gym, a small weight room, a couple of racquetball courts and offices for the staff. About 130 basketball teams in the city have to wait their turn at the downtown center and public school gyms.

The Tautphaus Park indoor skating rink is so overused that some 400 participants in the Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association can play only early in the morning or late at night. When these players compete in Wyoming, Montana and elsewhere in Idaho, they see what they're lacking at home -- updated ice surfacing; large, serviceable locker rooms; and bleachers that comfortably seat hundreds of spectators.



It's not just youth hockey players who desire access to the ice rink. Adult competitors and ordinary skaters would like to use it but often can't.

The Rec Center and the indoor skating rink represent an acute problem that Idaho Falls has to consider and then resolve.



The 2003 bond issue failed, in part, because it relied too heavily on property taxes and comparatively high user fees thereafter -- and its critics included private fitness club owners who contended tax dollars should not be used to underwrite their competitors.

What's needed, then, is a hybrid -- something that taps into public and private resources. (It's important to note that of the \$1.3 million Idaho Falls spends on recreation this year --

not including golf courses, which pay for themselves -- a total of \$700,000 comes from user fees.)

Nampa offers some guidance. Back in the early 1990s, that community embarked on an innovative plan to sell memberships. No tax dollars were involved. It got additional cash donations and even money from a cable television franchise. By the time the building was finished, more than 13,000 had purchased memberships.

The 140,000-square-foot Nampa Recreation Center offers a six-pool aquatics center, three gymnasiums, six racquetball courts, a walking/running track, a large weight room with exercise equipment, a climbing wall, aerobic and gymnastic centers, dance and ballet rooms, art and craft facilities, and a snack and play center.

To build its own facility, Idaho Falls probably can't escape the requirement for some help from the taxpayer, as well as user fees to support the operation. But the key to moving forward rests with the private activists in this town. Like their counterparts in Nampa, will they step up?

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# Idaho Falls peewees second in Salmon

POST REGISTER

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The Idaho Falls Eagles peewee travel hockey team finished second at an eight-team tournament in Salmon this past weekend.

The Eagles won their first three games to make it to the championship, but lost 6-4 to Salt Lake in a shootout, despite outshooting the Grizzlies 29-11.

Defense led the Eagles throughout the tournament. They opened play Friday with a 4-3 victory over Sun Valley.

On Saturday, Idaho Falls topped a team from Portland, Ore., 4-0 and then beat Ogden, Utah, 5-2.

The Eagles' defensive corps of Garrett Wheeler, Mason Durfee, Nick Hanson, Billy Heaton and Derick Vanenkevort played well all weekend in front of goalies Ian Schoenrock and Nick Branter.

Over the four games, the Eagles outshot their opponents 85-39.

Wheeler led the Eagles in scoring with five goals. Chad McNight and Jacob Dogal each added three goals.

Alex Wachs, Zach Davis, Vanenkevort, Garrett Cook, Casey Hergesheimer and Jake Thornberry each had a goal during the tournament.

Davis had two assists in four games. Hanson, Cook, Durfee and McNight also had an assist apiece.

The Eagles peewee team plays again this weekend in its five-team tournament Saturday and Sunday at Tautphaus Park.