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## The big chill

### Campaign slowly improves I.F. ice rink

By CLARK CORBIN

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Hockey moms call it the hockey barn, the ice box or the tin shed.

It's the rink where locker rooms are too small, the toilets overflow and spectators best dress for arctic conditions.

Others call it the Tautphaus Park hockey shelter.

Officially, it's known as the Wayne Lehto / Joe Marmo Ice Arena.

No matter what you choose to call it, there is agreement over its problems. The city-owned ice rink and the home of the Idaho Falls Youth Hockey Association is outdated and overcrowded.

"We know it as the coldest rink in Idaho," youth hockey president Bev Hott said.

The three locker rooms are too small by today's standards, especially considering eight teams may descend on the arena for a weekend tournament. You've also got girls' programs fighting for equitable locker room space.

There is no room for a pro shop to offer basic services such as skate sharpening, and there is barely space to house the rental skates available during public ice time.

But that's changing, little by little.

The hockey association, city, volunteers and parents began a campaign in the last year to revitalize the arena.

Progress is steady, with bigger dreams on the horizon. The youth hockey club purchased and hung public address speakers to add a touch of professionalism and allow them to play music during warm-ups and breaks in the actions.

The group purchased more heaters this season to make games more comfortable and volunteers are resurfacing bleachers to save the rears of moms,



Vern Peterson claps under new heaters at the Tautphaus Park ice rink while watching his son play in a peewee hockey game Wednesday. During the summer, the rink received several improvements, including the heaters and new bleachers. - Nate Chute / nchute@postregister.com



Nate Chute / nchute@postregister.com - Jacob Dogal attempts to swipe the puck away during a peewee hockey game Wednesday.



Nate Chute / nchute@postregister.com - Mark Webster drives the Zamboni between a peewee and bantam hockey game at the Tautphaus Park ice rink Thursday. Webster is one of the volunteers who helped put in new bleachers.

dads and grandparents in attendance.

The club and city also insulated the arena last year, and this year, volunteers splashed the warming area with a new coat of paint.

On top of that, high school student Devin Chrighton is building metal bleachers to make watching games more comfortable for spectators.

In the last year, the hockey association has spent \$60,000 on improvements, which includes its share of the insulation and roof replacement projects that the group split with the city, Hott said.

"It's an old facility, but youth hockey has always stepped up to the plate," said Rich Straub, the city's recreation superintendent.

And more is on the way, possibly by 2010. The youth hockey association and the city have plans to knock down and remodel the arena's lobby, the so-called warming hut. New, expanded locker rooms are on the docket, as are new bathrooms and, perhaps, a small pro shop.

But it will all cost money, and Straub said the project is in its infancy and expense estimates have yet to be calculated. The major renovations aren't in next year's city budget either, Straub said.

Youth hockey board members argue that the rink is an asset to the city and offers benefits to scores of youngsters, casual skaters and area business. But, to meet the needs of so many, the arena needs a drastic face lift, they say.

"We bring a lot of teams in here on a monthly basis for tournaments," Hott said. "There are always games going on, and the revenue we're bringing into the city is large."

Straub agrees.

"I think the number and quality of athletic fields or recreation facilities in a community directly reflects the health of that community," he said.

Indeed, the city's parks and recreation department says 34,000 users flock to the ice rink during its five-month winter season.

The arena is open noon to midnight seven days a week. More than 330 youth players participate in league play and schools utilize the ice during physical education classes and public skate sessions are usually available Tuesday evenings and Friday and Saturday afternoons. The late-night adult league has another 100 players.

"It's worth it because it supports a lot of kids," said Kellie Latham, a mom of four hockey players. "It's keeping 335 kids busy between the end of October and the end of May."

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