

History of Hazelridge Sports Complex

By Brenda Sawatzky

In 1952, one paid worker supervised the carpentry work of a group of volunteers as they built the 30'x60' Hazelridge Legion Hall. Within time, Legion members wanted to build an addition onto it. The dozen members were unable to raise the funds necessary for expansion, and as it was privately owned, government grants were not made available. So, in 1969, the Legion Hall was sold to the Hazelridge community for the princely sum of \$1.00. That same year, with grants and hard work, community volunteers erected the 42'x80' addition to the newly named Hazelridge Hall.



In 1960, the Hazelridge community consisted of 39 people (children included) and they built the 2 sheet curling rink. In the early 70's an outdoor skating rink was added.

Shortly after Hazelridge got the addition (which included a large kitchen), a group of 8-10 women formed Hazelridge Catering. It is because of these women that the indoor arena became a reality. They earned enough through their catering for the hall to put a down payment of \$100,000 for the erection of the arena. Another \$100,000 was borrowed at 23% interest. As quoted by Paul Nazarko, "We all worked like hell to keep the payments up, and we had it paid for in 4 ½ years". The arena was contracted out, as a "bare bones" affair, as it was built over the outdoor lights. Originally, it took three men to flood the rink. One man to pull the "T" holding the water soaked rags and two others to carry the hose. Eventually, a tractor was purchased and then the Zamboni.

Great effort has consistently been made by a few in a small community to ensure the success of the Hazelridge Sports Club.

Although community volunteers erected the 42'x80' addition to the newly named Hazelridge Hall in 1969, the hall wasn't even finished when a New Year's Eve celebration was planned. Hay bales were brought in to be used as seats, a wood stove was erected to supply heat and a group of ladies from the community banded together to feed the revelers. Led by Kay Skibo, they aptly fed the crowd at the sold-out New Years celebration. The new hall brought in reservations for numerous celebratory reasons, but word of mouth ensured profits to be made from a catering business (profits that would be used to build the arena). The original Hazelridge Caterers consisted of Kay Skibo, Mildred Burek, Louise Kuzyk, Minnie Osiowy, Emily Solar*, Stella Kusmac, Jennie Kozak, Jean Nieckarz*, Kay Ross and Martha Kowalchuk. (* are deceased). Willy Burek* and Dennis Nimchuk* were honorary caterers as they helped any way they could; lifting heavy pots, mashing potatoes and ensuring the hall was well supplied and ready for upcoming events. When needed, over the years, other women from the community stepped in to help with the catering business, by waitressing or food preparation. In February, 1971, Kay left the volunteer catering business, so Emily Solar and Martha Kowalchuk stepped in to lead the ladies for the sold-out Nights of Columbus Banquet. With 300 mouths to feed and unsure of the recipes, Martha made up 3 different spare-rib recipes, sat her family

down and they were to pick the one they liked the most. All were good, so she blended the three recipes and this recipe is still used at the Hazelridge Fall Supper. Martha and Emily lived in the immediate community, so it made sense for them to co-ordinate the suppers. Eventually, Margo Garbutt headed the caterers. Throughout the years the local farm ladies were **very dedicated** to the catering business! 20 years of catering at the Hazelridge Hall would not have happened without these wonderful women. If an event was booked for the hall and they were invited to another function, their husbands and family would attend the other event while the dedicated women would work their commitment. It wasn't unusual to have 40 catering jobs in one year and these women never failed to deliver an outstanding meal.

For the first two years, the women volunteered their time and energy. As the hall was able to maintain itself through rentals, the monies made through catering would go towards the catering business, wages for the women and towards building an arena. An hourly wage of \$1.00 per hour was implemented for the women (minimum wage was \$3.00 at the time). But it gave the women enough money to pay for gas, and as many had never worked for a wage, it gave some of them a sense of independence. Except for the first stove in the halls kitchen, all of the halls' utensils, appliances and tables were purchased (if not already donated) by the caterers within 4 years. Prior to that, all food was prepared by the women at the hall and then taken home to be cooked. There was never a shortage of women willing to take the food home to be cooked as they were paid \$1.00/hour for cooking cabbage rolls (which usually took 3-4 hours). By the late 70's, over \$100,000 raised through catering was used for the down payment of the arena. All from catering!

The parties held at the Hazelridge Hall were famous for fun and food. The liquor commission allowed for a 300 person capacity. Regular dances with live bands were held (New Years Eve, Ukrainian New Years and Valentines Day to name a few), and regular customers (from Hazelridge, Anola, Dugald, Cooks Creek and Oak Bank) would purchase half of the tickets the day they became available. Almost every celebration had a sold out crowd and anything catered for over 200 people ensured profits for Hazelridge Catering. For 20 years these amazing women encouraged the local economy by purchasing foods locally while catering for the hall and then gave all proceeds towards the building of the arena. Their wages had increased to \$5/hour (still less than minimum wage) during this time and by 1991, they catered their last social event. They closed the catering business accounts and by the late 90's they presented the final \$35,000 to the Hazelridge Sports Complex as a down-payment on the arena's extension (the new dressing rooms).



After 1991, the HSC started making dozens of perogies and it continues to be the largest fund raiser for us (raising \$3500-\$5000/yr). Wanting to continue giving back to their community, women that had been involved in catering began to help out with perogie making. It started as a social event, to get together with old friends and meet new ones and now they are deeply involved once again in making monies for the

sports complex. But no longer known as the Hazelridge Caterers, they are affectionately introduced to new members and are now known as "The Baba's".



"The Baba's" left to right:

Yvonne Nazarko, Mildred Burek, Blanche Habing, Anne Tchir, Elaine Stelmaschuk, Louise Kuzyk and Martha Kowalchuk

However they identify themselves, "The Hazelridge Caterers" or "The Baba's", we salute them. Their hard work, sense of community and love of life are deeply ingrained within the Hazelridge Sports Complex. It is with great pleasure and pride that some of us have had the chance to work with them during our bi-weekly perogy making. **Thank you** once again for making it possible for so many of us to enjoy so much for so little.



"The Baba's" and friends; making perogies.

It is with gratitude that we thank these women, past and present members and our community family that have invested time, energy and pride into ensuring the success of the Hazelridge Sports Complex. Many people have passed through HSC doors as parents, members, spectators and volunteers, but unfortunately, the Hazelridge Hall's doors were permanently shut this spring. Start-up costs for the arena alone costs thousands of dollars and because the hall is a separate building, to keep it running is beyond our current budget. Although this at first saddens a great number of people to see a memory-filled landmark closed, it also brings exciting prospects to our community. Dedicated members of the club have set in motion a plan to expand the arena so that a viewing room with 300 person sitting capacity will be added onto the east side of the existing arena. The addition and renovations will ensure an all-in-one complex, complete with large kitchen (to continue making our famous fund-raising perogies), heated viewing room capable of sitting 300 people for our fall supper and a larger canteen enclosed within the viewing area. With progress comes change, and the Hazelridge Sports Complex continues to grow and improve. Sporting the largest figure skating club in the Eastman region with on average, 55 families and over 100 members, the people involved with the club are truly inspiring. Holding true with tradition, the labour involved in improving and expanding our facility is never paid for. Labour is generously donated by volunteers. The volunteer names have changed over the years but one thing always remains the same; foresight for the future, perseverance, perspiration, generosity, team-work and love for the community, the kids and for the future preservation of the club. Although Springfield is the richest municipality in Manitoba, only \$50/capita is spent versus other municipalities spending \$80/capita. Hazelridge sees very little of that money. Instead, it is up to current members to raise money for improvements to the club. As we continue to fundraise to ensure quality programs we will also be fundraising for the expansion. Ideas, donations and leaving a legacy for Hazelridge Sports Complex expansion would be very much appreciated.

The Hazelridge Figure Skating Ice Show: Then and Now

By the spring of '82, the Hazelridge arena was built. It was decided that there should be a figure skating club, but when it was revealed that a skating coach would cost money, the idea was vehemently opposed by some. "The hockey coaches weren't paid, why should a figure skating coach be paid?" But, Virginia and Stan Matkowski along with Elaine and Bob Gregg persevered in the fight for a skating club and in the end; Marie Hughes was hired as the figure skating coach.

Marie strapped on her first pair of bob-skates at the tender age of three and learned to skate on frozen ponds in Kenora, Ontario. Lessons started when she was 13, and by her early twenty's, she was performing as "The Only Ballerina on Blades", in Canada's first home-grown professional ice show, The Canadian Ice Fantasy. The ice show ran from 1953 to 1955. The first two years were box office hits, but with the introduction of affordable television sets, people stopped thinking of unheated arenas as a form of entertainment. Marie's love of skating coupled with her love of children was the deciding factor in becoming a coach. What better way to give back to the communities that had readily embraced her? For 40 years she taught skating in Kenora and Manitoba, retiring in 1993 after a car accident.

In '82, Marie met the parents interested in forming a skating club. She assured them that seeing their children's skating accomplishments in their own arena along with meeting new friends and the experience of achieving would provide the children with a wonderful winter experience. It was decided that money would be raised through skating dues and fundraising to pay for her tutor ledge. An Ice Carnival would give the children confidence, bring out their talent while performing; teach them to move with timing to music while having fun. The Ice Carnival brought the community together while supporting the program. It is with great pride and wonderful memories that Marie remembers our skating community. She firmly believes that the sports club is the "bone of the community" and the centre first flourished due to the families of Matkowski, Gregg, Fisher, Saramaga and Skibo to name a few. These were tremendous people who gave tirelessly. Marie earned the trust of the community, giving utmost love to their children and making their winters on ice safe and fun. She taught the children to skate and wanted to show the community their accomplishments by holding an ice carnival at the end of the season. Her experience covered everything;

costumes, sets and personality (music, choreographing and bringing out the children's talent). So, in the early spring of 1983, Hazelridge Figure Skating Club held "Celebration", its first annual Ice Carnival (later renamed Hazelridge FSC Annual Ice Show). The kids won the hearts of the audience, as they continue to do so every year. For many years, the Masters of Ceremonies were celebrities such as Laurie Mustard and Al Simmons, we had guest skaters along with our own skaters, which all had unforgettable performances. Within a few short years, Hazelridge FSC skaters were being invited to other clubs as guest performers.

Many of these young skaters went on in life to accomplish careers in fields far different than skating; medicine, teaching, pharmacy, public relations, communication, movies, Walt Disney productions, agriculture, etc. Their confidence and people presentation skills have been nurtured from their community to a great degree. Many have told Marie that it was their experience gained through the carnival, greeting and meeting and skating through recreation that made them believe in themselves enabling them to follow their dreams. Anne Letrie from CBC filmed the HFSC Carnival in 1987, the final year that Marie coached for us. Anne was impressed, dubbing it, "Manitoba's Mini Ice Capades".

Fundamental knowledge was the essence of her years of building skating clubs such as Manitoba's Miami, East St. Paul, Oak Bank, St. Anne and her last club, Hazelridge. Whether the club was already started or brand new, Marie went into clubs with the focus on leaving it strong and ready to be CFSA sanctioned. In 1987-88, HFSC was CFSA sanctioned, so Marie's daughter, Michelle Koske was hired as the head coach. That first year as a CFSA club, they competed in the Eastern regional competition and they won in just about every category they entered.

Boys that were in the canskate program also became better hockey players because of it. Our current skating director, Larissa Maslechko skated in March of the '84-85 season, "Kaleidoscope" carnival. Eleven years later, (February of 1996), Larissa would direct her first ice show, "Under the Big Top". Marie still remembers Larissa first skating with knees very stiff. So she took Larissa aside and said, "Let's pretend we're dancing". Well, the right buttons were pressed and the difference in her skating style was like magic. From then on, Larissa skated as if she had "wings on her feet".



Larissa Maslechko and others performed "We're the Care Bears and Little Rubber Duckie", March, 1985 during Kaleidoscope Ice Carnival



Clowns from "Under the Big Top", February 1996: Jodelle Nault, Kristen Roccola, Mandy Shields, Amanda Chubaty, Rikki Buck & Jennifer Doern.

Marie has wonderful memories of our club. The terrific community of Hazelridge with the wonderful spirit to see recreation in their community for their children and their childrens children, Marie's heart sings to think that she was so fortunate to have known many of the people and have had the privilege to have had their support in her humble efforts to see HFSC flourish, as it continues to flourish. The skaters were the crème de crème, their presence and talent an inspiration for the club. The administration, community and parents were "real blue bloods" as they conducted themselves to ensure a successful club.

Through it all, Marie's husband Jack was always there, lending her his strength and support to ensure her endeavors to be successful. Son John helped out tremendously during the skating season as well as at Ice Carnivals, which Marie is also very grateful for. She directed her last show of her career at Hazelridge which has given her "a simply wonderful memory to end her Ice Carnival career".

Hazelridge is truly a great community of families then and now. Marie would like to thank all of you that made the club a success as it continues to be a success due to the hard work and dedication of families.



Marie Hughes and husband Jack watch Hazelridge FSC 23rd annual ice show, "Under the Sea", February 26, 2006

Now.....

On February 26, 2006, the Hazelridge Figure Skating Club presented their 23rd annual ice show, "Under the Sea". The stands were buzzing with talk of the silent auction prizes and in anticipation for the show. The back drop and costumes set the stage for a wonderful afternoon of kids skating to tunes from under the sea. Starting with six young girls skating to Shark Tale's "Carwash", we knew we were in for a real treat.



In no specific order: Nicola Odaisky, Nichole Lamoureux, Arianne Gruninger, Jessa Magura, Angela Hofer and Renee Hadaller (with coaches Jaquelyn Lacroix & Melanie Doern) performed "Carwash" from A Shark Tale.

Their skating skills were well demonstrated while showing a flare for theatrics as they washed and skated their way through their number. Dressed as little mermaids, Triton's Daughters were cute as buttons as their tails sliced through the water.



Triton's Daughters from Little Mermaid: Cali Baker, Bailey Bonney, Serena Gray-Withers, Josephine Hixt, Kelsey Hofer, Brooke-Lynn Jackson, Layne Dostiuk, Kortney Rogers (Coaches Andreanna Willems, Natalie Risbey & Jessalyn Willems-absent)

Little lost boys and a couple of crocodiles from Peter Pan's "Never Smile at a Crocodile" had the audience smiling and laughing. The list of entertainers goes on, penguins, pirates and surfers to name a few. All three of the synchronization skating teams wowed the audience with their display of complicated steps while in perfect formation. Solos from all levels of skating also played a large part of the show. The older star skaters including the two adults were truly inspirational to the young Canskaters as they proved that you are never too old to learn and it is never too late to follow your dreams.

The Hazelridge Figure Skating Club has continued the tradition of teaching a quality program while the kids have fun building skating skills along with their confidence. Our skating director, Larissa Maslechko, has been part of the program for 21 years and is ready for another exciting and busy year of skating. Entering her 12th year of coaching at the club, Larissa's dedication to Hazelridge is obvious and she has often been heard calling the club her second home. A big proponent of encouraging skaters to get involved in coaching, Larissa is happy to hear that her very first private lesson student, Ally Gray-Beauchesne, will be coordinating the Canskate program again this year, having taken it over last year. Ally, too, has called Hazelridge her home for her entire skating career and her love of the sport and the skaters at the club shows. Being the club's 24th year of skating, the two look forward to working together to make this year better than all the rest.