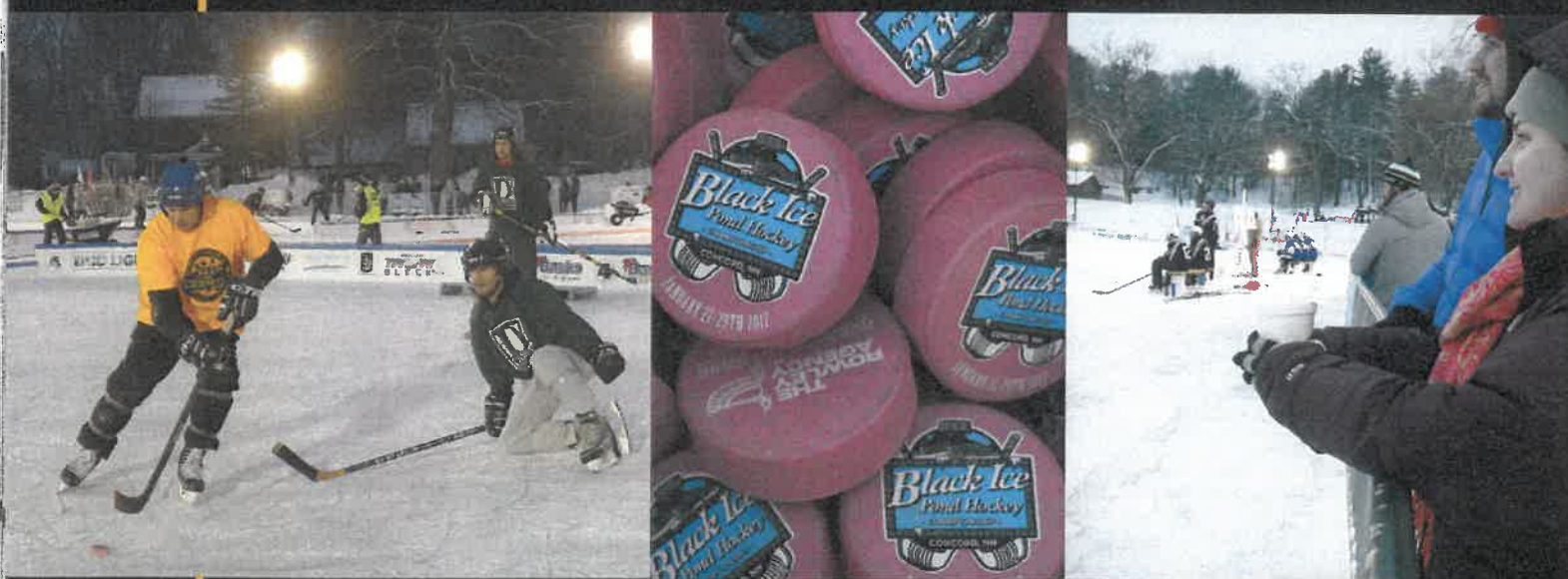


BY RAY CARBONE | PHOTOS BY ALLEGRA BOVERMAN

THE BEST THING ON ICE: BLACK ICE POND HOCKEY

WILL IT BE THE NO REGRETSKIES, SCARED HITLESS,
OR TEAM AGAINST MEDICAL ADVICE THAT TAKES
HOME THE CHAMPIONSHIP THIS WINTER?



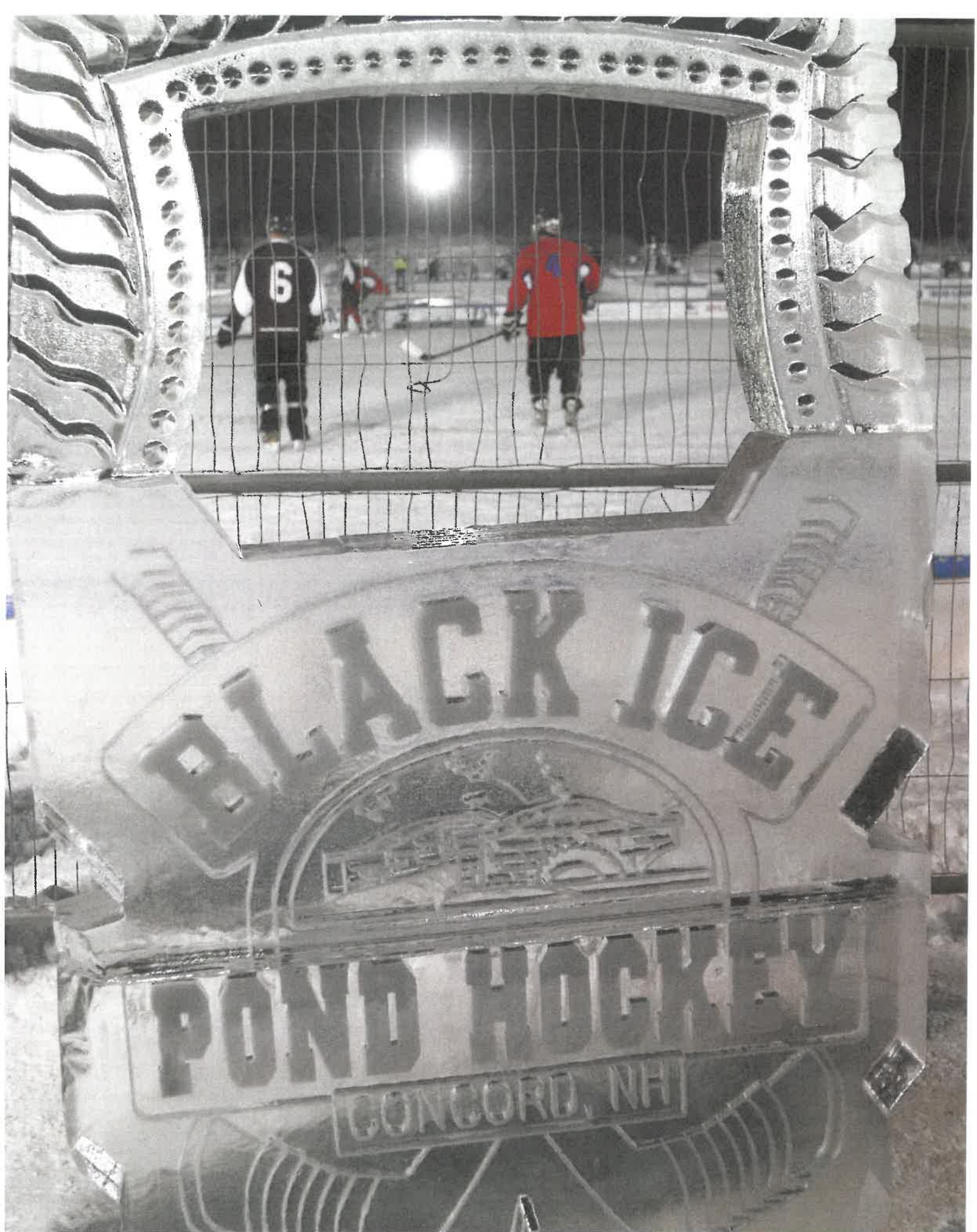
It's always been a neighborhood thing. Back in the 1860s, the boys at St. Paul's School played a game called shinny. There were no rules, set positions, or even standard pucks and sticks. It was a free-for-all out on the ice, much like a game of sandlot football.

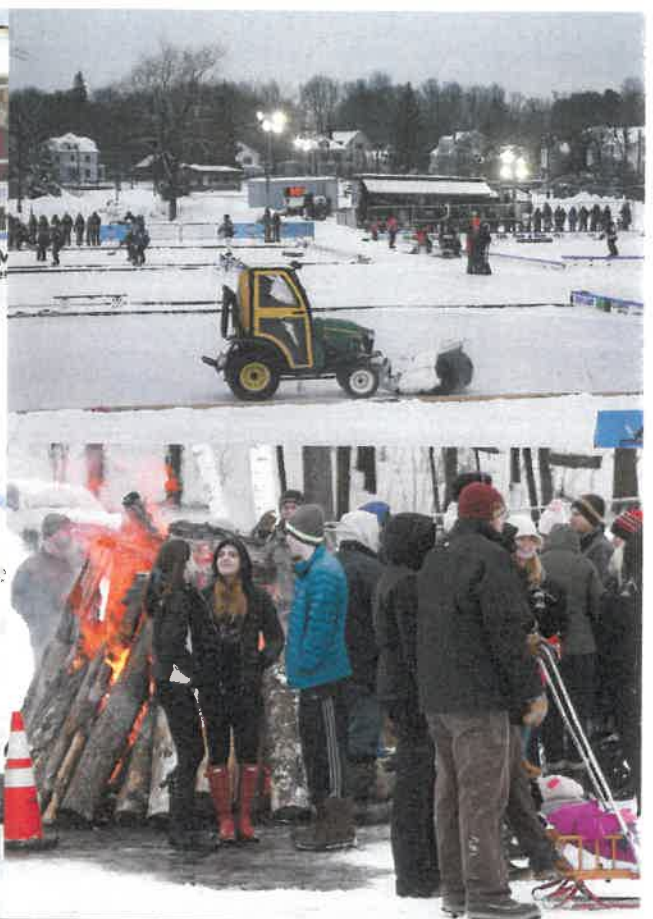
The school's tradition was that as soon as the first black ice (smooth, hard ice) covered ponds in November, the students, masters, and staff were released for a black ice holiday. That meant everyone outside, on skates, and on the pond.

For the game, half the student population would often face off against the other half. The kids used sticks, branches, and anything else to move the ball or rock or chunk of wood or whatever else served as the puck across the ice to the jury-rigged goals at either end of the pond.

A FIRST

In 1880, a schoolmaster named James P. Conover returned from a business trip to Montreal with some long, purposefully shaped sticks and a small, octagonal, leather-covered wooden block to serve as the puck. Then on





IT SEEMS LIKE ALMOST EVERYONE I KNOW IS THERE. FROM THE RINK MONITORS TO THE CONCESSION PEOPLE, THEY'RE ALL FAMILIAR FACES FROM GROWING UP IN THE CONCORD AREA.

— MARK HODGKINS, PLAYER

November 17, 1883, the St. Paul's School community turned out to watch the first organized game of ice hockey in the US.

It was the beginning of Concord's long love affair with the sport, an affection now celebrated annually at the 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship. The three-day event is both the city's unofficial winter carnival and a kind of New Hampshire Old Home Day on ice. Players, family, friends, and visitors enjoy the casual fun of the games while catching up with old friends and reveling in the chilly holiday.

More than one hundred teams will participate in this year's 1883 Black Ice Championship, and most have ties to the Concord area. Each will play four games over the first two days to determine the best two teams in each of six divisions. The top teams will meet on the final day to determine the champions. Throughout the event, the competition will be fierce but friendly.

MORE THAN A GAME

It's the kind of atmosphere that draws people like Jeff Reagan back to Concord from their current homes in New York City. "My dad grew up playing hockey in Concord, and he taught me how to play," Jeff says. "I played into high school. I always come back; it's always fun."

He adds, "It's not the most glamorous event. Most of the time when you go on a vacation, you go someplace that's warm or you're seeing something you've never seen before. But I get to see my parents and my family, and I play on a team with a lot of my friends I grew up with—guys I've been friends with since middle school and high school."

Mark Hodgkins of Contoocook tells a similar story. He and his teammates are usually familiar with many of the one-hundred-plus volunteers and at least half of the hundreds of other players. "I've been involved with the men's leagues ever since I got out of youth hockey," he says, "so I know a lot of the guys who are the volunteers, the organizers, and a lot of the other people. It seems like almost everyone I know is there. From the rink monitors to the concession people, they're all familiar faces from growing up in the Concord area."

The loose camaraderie even extends to new friends, Mark says. "We've been in the same division since we started, and we're starting to recognize and become friends with some of the guys from teams that aren't from the area. The team that just beat you, you start joking around with them, and it's just a joyful atmosphere, a

fun environment."

Tom Wright, who has been working with the city's parks and recreation department for forty years and has been part of the 1883 Black Ice Championship from its beginning, loves the renewal of old friendships. "It is local, and it's like a reunion," he says.

WHY NOT CONCORD? INDEED, WHY NOT?

The idea for the 1883 Black Ice Championship started in 2010, after Chris Brown, a local businessman who serves as founder and chief organizer of the program, got together over a couple of beers with other players in his men's league. They were talking about the success of the New England Pond Hockey Classic, which had kicked off in the Lakes Region the previous year.

"And we said, 'Why not Concord?'" he recalls. "We have such a rich hockey heritage. There's St. Paul's School, where they had the first organized game of hockey in America. And Hobey Baker, probably the most renowned amateur hockey player ever, and then there's all the people who've played in the Olympics and in professional hockey who were from Concord."

The first challenge was coming up with a memorable title. "We thought of Hobey Baker, of course," Chris says, referring to the famous St. Paul's School athlete, "but we figured somebody's got to have the name registered, his family or some college hockey organization."

Jim Hayes, executive director of the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey Museum, suggested using black ice in the title. "It was a term that was popular at St. Paul's. Black ice was the first good ice of the season, before it gets all the white marks all over it from skating." To commemorate the year of the first organized game, 1883 was added.

From the start, one of the biggest goals of the 1883 Black Ice Championship was to help support neighborhood hockey. "The Black Ice Association is a nonprofit group," Chris says. "We've donated well over \$250,000 back to the community in the first seven years of the tournament."

The association helped to pay for the dredging of White Park Pond, which stabilized its skating area. It also donated funds to reestablish a skating area at Rollins Park. "That was the first time there was a skating area in South Concord in twenty years," Chris says. The tournament is now looking to raise \$450,000 to fund half the cost of a new skate house adjacent to the pond. It would replace an older structure that's been shuttered for years.



CONCORD'S RICH HOCKEY HISTORY

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, CONCORD HAS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOCKEY IN AMERICA. BELOW IS A TIMELINE OF THE CITY'S HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS.

1856 St. Paul's School opens. That first winter, the prep school students play shinny, an early version of hockey. Within a few years, they're calling the game hockey.

1880 A St. Paul's School master returns from Canada with some sport-specific equipment and a list of rules.

1883 The first organized game of hockey in the US is played at St. Paul's School. Rules become formalized, directing a total of eleven players per side.

1884 With input from the St. Paul's School masters, rules continue to develop, dropping the number of players on a

side to seven. Soon afterward, the number is reduced again to the current standard of six. School staff create a system to flood an area of the campus to create a dependable ice rink.

1888 St. Paul's School names alumni Malcolm Gordon—known as the father of American hockey—as its hockey coach. Gordon has a remarkable twenty-year career, helping to standardize rules and leading numerous students to fall in love with the game. It's not an exaggeration to say that the St. Paul's alumnus evangelized the gospel of hockey across the country.

1895 St. Paul's School alumni, students, and friends

gather for the school's first away game at a rink in New York City. Around the same time, an alumni group buys the old St. Nicholas Ice Company and converts it, creating the St. Nicholas Rink. The rink becomes a landmark and, for many years, the location of the school's annual New York game. The games continue for more than seventy years. In 1926, they move to Madison Square Garden and are dubbed the Garden Game.

1900s The *Concord Monitor* reports on two teams of youngsters playing hockey at White Park: the Concord Young Sluggers and the Young I.O.C.

1903 Hobart Amory Hare ("Hobey") Baker, age eleven, enrolls at St. Paul's School. Baker develops into an astounding player and becomes known at the school for his "night flights" across the pond ice, skating swiftly along while precisely steering the puck in the dark. As team

captain, Baker regularly leads his high school teammates to convincing wins against the top collegiate teams in the country. The annual award for the best college hockey player in America is named after Baker.

1914 Player substitutions are now allowed during games.

1919 Concord High School (CHS) sponsors a boys' team that plays at White Park.

1921 Concord teenager Douglas N. Everett is named captain of the Colby Academy (now Colby-Sawyer College) hockey team in New London. He later attends Dartmouth College, where he displays remarkable skills. After graduation, Everett declines offers from three NHL teams, choosing to go into the insurance business. He continues playing hockey locally and for the University Club of Boston's team, one of the best amateur clubs in North America.

1924 CHS Athletic Director Coach Delly Callahan (also active in Concord's Sunset Baseball League) announces a plan to start an interschool hockey league in the elementary grades, with the goal of developing hockey into a major high school sport. Games are played at White Park. Later that year, the CHS Independents, forerunners of an official school team, play at St. Paul's School.

1925 Girls' hockey is first mentioned in a *Concord Monitor* story, noting "the boys, as well as the girls, were fortified with hockey sticks."

1928 Everett is named to the 1928 Olympic team, but he is unable to raise the funds to travel to Switzerland.

1931 The Sacred Heart (Sacre Coeur) Hockey Club, associated with Sacred Heart Catholic Church, is formed, and the city's golden age of men's hockey begins. For most of the next decade, the Hearts

IT'S ALL IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

There was never much of a question of where to hold the 1883 Black Ice Championship. "White Park played a prominent role in the evolution of ice hockey in the city of Concord," says Jim Hayes. "It became the primary skating facility for hockey, particularly in the north and west ends of the city, up until the Douglas N. Everett Arena opened in 1965."

The White Park location gives it a neighborhood flavor that distinguishes the local tournament from similar pond hockey events scattered around North America. "A lot of them have become vacation destinations," Chris says. "They've done a wonderful job creating this kind of thing in the Lakes Region. You're bringing your team in for a weekend and they're going to see the area."

"Ours is like that, but having it at White Park—I think a lot of people learned how to skate on that pond. I grew up playing hockey, and the first time I ever skated was on that pond. So to come back and play at an event like this, it kind of completes the circle in a lot of people's minds."

The park also has some social and historical significance. It's only about three miles from St. Paul's campus; it's the site where the students played that first game of hockey; and Armenia S. White—widow of Nathaniel White, the founder of American Express—donated the park to the city a year later.

Ever since White Park opened, its pond has drawn kids from the neighborhoods around it and from St. Paul's School. "I would say that the pond has helped the game to kind of cross lines,"

compete with the Concord Hockey Club and the Millville Bruins to claim the title of best in the city while also facing off against talented teams from other parts of New England and Canada.

1932 Everett is again named to the US Olympic team. This time, he makes the trip to Lake Placid, New York, where he leads his team to a silver medal.

1933 CHS officially sponsors a boys' hockey team. The *Concord Monitor* notes that the sport was brought back "after a lapse of several years."

1936 Twenty-six young women are reported to be playing in a local girls' youth league

1938 CHS wins the first of two state scholastic titles. The second is won in 1946.

1952 On their way to Oslo, Norway, the US Olympic

Hockey Team plays a tune-up game against the Sacred Heart Hockey Club on the locals' ice. After two periods, the Hearts are leading 5-3, but they eventually lose to the Olympians 8-6. The US team goes on to win the silver medal.

1959 CHS revives its hockey team after an absence of ten years. The Concord Youth Hockey program begins, with boys' teams at several age levels. It becomes the Concord Youth Hockey Association in 1968.

1962 A new men's league is established. Over the next twenty-five years, several amateur leagues form and disband, including the Can-Am League, the Granite State League, the Industrial League, and the Capital City Hockey League. They go on to play all or part of their seasons at the Everett Arena.

1965 The Douglas N. Everett Arena, named for the famous

Olympian, opens. Its schedule is soon filled with skating activities for all ages, including several hockey programs. Today, it is still the city's only indoor public rink.

1969 Bishop Brady High School initiates a hockey team, kicking off a longtime rivalry with CHS.

1977 St. Paul's School student Lee Blossom transfers to CHS for his senior year and leads the Crimson Tide to its first official state title.

1982 CHS graduate Kent Carlson is drafted by the NHL's Montréal Canadiens. He later plays for the St. Louis Blues and the Washington Capitals.

1984 St. Paul's School graduate Don Sweeney is drafted by the Boston Bruins. He instead attends Harvard University, where he wins accolades as a college player. Sweeney later plays with the Bruins for fifteen years, then moves on to the front office

where he currently serves as general manager. The New Hampshire Women's Select Hockey Team starts with a group of eleven-to-thirteen-year-old girls, many from Concord. The girls play against several prep school teams, frequently besting the high school students. The team ages along with the players, and several go on to play women's college hockey.

1993 CHS starts a girls' hockey team.

1994 Concord Youth Hockey Association starts several multiage girls' teams.

1996 Women's hockey pioneer Tara Mounsey graduates from CHS. In her senior year, she leads the boys' team to a state championship and is named Player of the Year.

1998 Mounsey plays on the first US Olympic women's hockey team, which wins the sport's first gold medal. She

returns in 2002 and helps the team to earn silver. Mounsey is later inducted into the NH Legends of Hockey Hall of Fame; in 2013, she's named number three on a list of the Greatest 10 (Women) Players to ever play in New England. St. Paul's School alumnus Jeff Giuliano is called up from the minor league Manchester Monarchs to NHL's Los Angeles Kings. Giuliano has a thirteen-year professional career, spending time in North America and Europe.

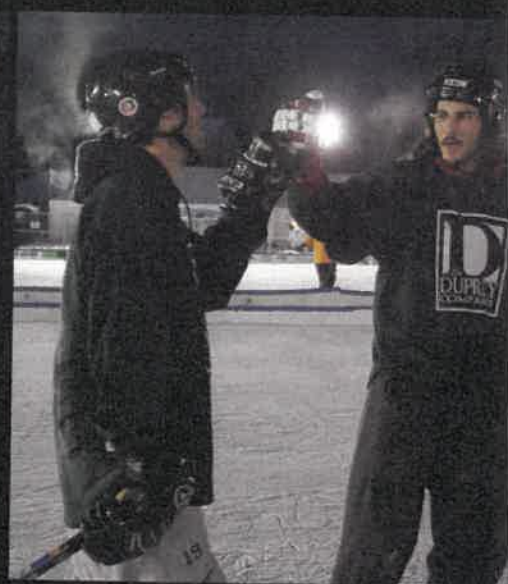
2011 The 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship is inaugurated.

2013 Bishop Brady initiates a girls' varsity team, combining its best players with those from Trinity Christian School

Jim Hayes, executive director of the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey, supplied most of this information. Special thanks also to staff at St. Paul's School for their assistance.



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IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'VE GOT FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS' WORTH OF EQUIPMENT OR TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS THAT YOU USED TO GET SOME SECONDHAND SKATES. THERE IT'S JUST, 'LET'S GO DOWN AND PLAY.'

— CHRIS BROWN, FOUNDER AND CHIEF ORGANIZER

Chris explains, "White Park is right in the middle of the city, and there was a very blue-collar neighborhood on one side and a very white-collar one on the other. They're kind of split by the park. But everyone was drawn to the park. You could see people hanging out there each day.

"It doesn't matter if you've got five hundred dollars' worth of equipment or twenty-five dollars that you used to get some secondhand skates," he says. "There it's just, 'Let's go down and play.'"

NO BETTER WAY TO SPEND A WINTER DAY

Today, the 1883 Black Ice Championship has revived the neighborhood. This winter, it starts on Friday, January 26, with a few early games on the eight pond rinks. Gather around to watch the Moosetaches play the Stinky Socks, or the No RegretsKies face off against the Dogs on Linoleum. Later, you can stop off for a hot chocolate and a sandwich at Cimo's South End Deli concession tent. Afterward, head over to the Youth Hockey Rink to watch the five-to-seven-year-old Mites from the Concord Youth Hockey program try their best to stay on their skates.

If you're looking for a friend's team, you can pop into the Body Armor Players Tent on the edge of the park. It's a kind of giant locker-room that becomes a gathering center for players, coaches, and friends. Historic photos of Concord teams from other eras, on

loan from the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey collection, add a classic touch.

Back at the park, you can see the construction of ice sculptures or let your kids interact with Max, the Manchester Monarchs' mascot. Around 4pm a bonfire will be lit, and not long afterwards, the live music starts.

Meanwhile, the Sock Swamp Rats play the Scared Hitless on one rink while the Moose Knucklers face off versus the Against Medical Advice team on another. The day wraps up with an Atlas Fireworks display on Eastman Field in the park.

On Saturday, January 27, the whole thing happens again, with the Pond Jovis playing the Schnoekered squad in the men's division, while the GAL-oots and the Babes of Glory compete for the women's prize. On Sunday, the twelve teams that finished best in the divisions play for the illustrious Hobey Baker Stick Awards.

The sticks are made locally from ash wood and crafted by WS Dennison Cabinets of Pembroke. Mark Ruddy, a local hockey player with an artistic flair, finishes each one off with hand lettering and stain to give them a vintage appearance. When they're finished, they probably don't look much different from the original sticks brought back to St. Paul's from Canada in 1880. That's the kind of thing that happens when people pull together for the good of the neighborhood. ❄️

THE 2018 BLACK ICE POND HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP

The ninth annual 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship will be played January 26 to 28 on the pond at White Park in Concord. For more information, visit www.blackicepondhockey.com.

The 603 Brewery, one of the event's sponsors, annually produces its Black Ice American Ale, which is available throughout the Concord area. It was awarded a silver medal at the 2016 Best of Craft Beer Awards.

Concord native Jeff Reagan, a regular at the event, created a short film documentary called *Black Ice*. It was shown at the 2014 Somewhat North of Boston Film Festival at Red River Theatres and can be viewed at vimeo.com/150952463; the link is private, so for the password, write to Jeff at jeffreagan0@gmail.com.

Information about the New Hampshire Legends of Hockey is available at www.nhlegendsofhockey.com.

Information about St. Paul's School and its role in the history of hockey is available at www.sps.edu/page/about-sps/sps-history.

For more information about hockey in the Concord area, contact the city's Everett Arena, www.concordnh.gov/arena.

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HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP
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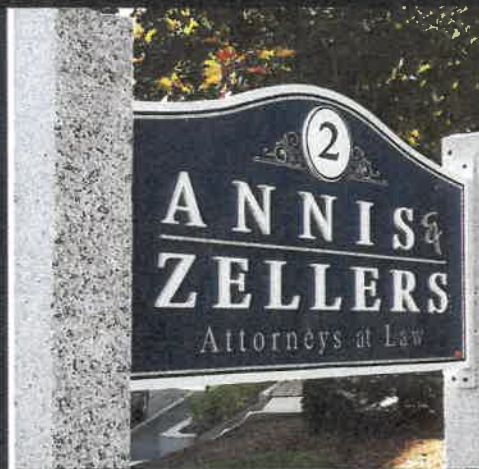
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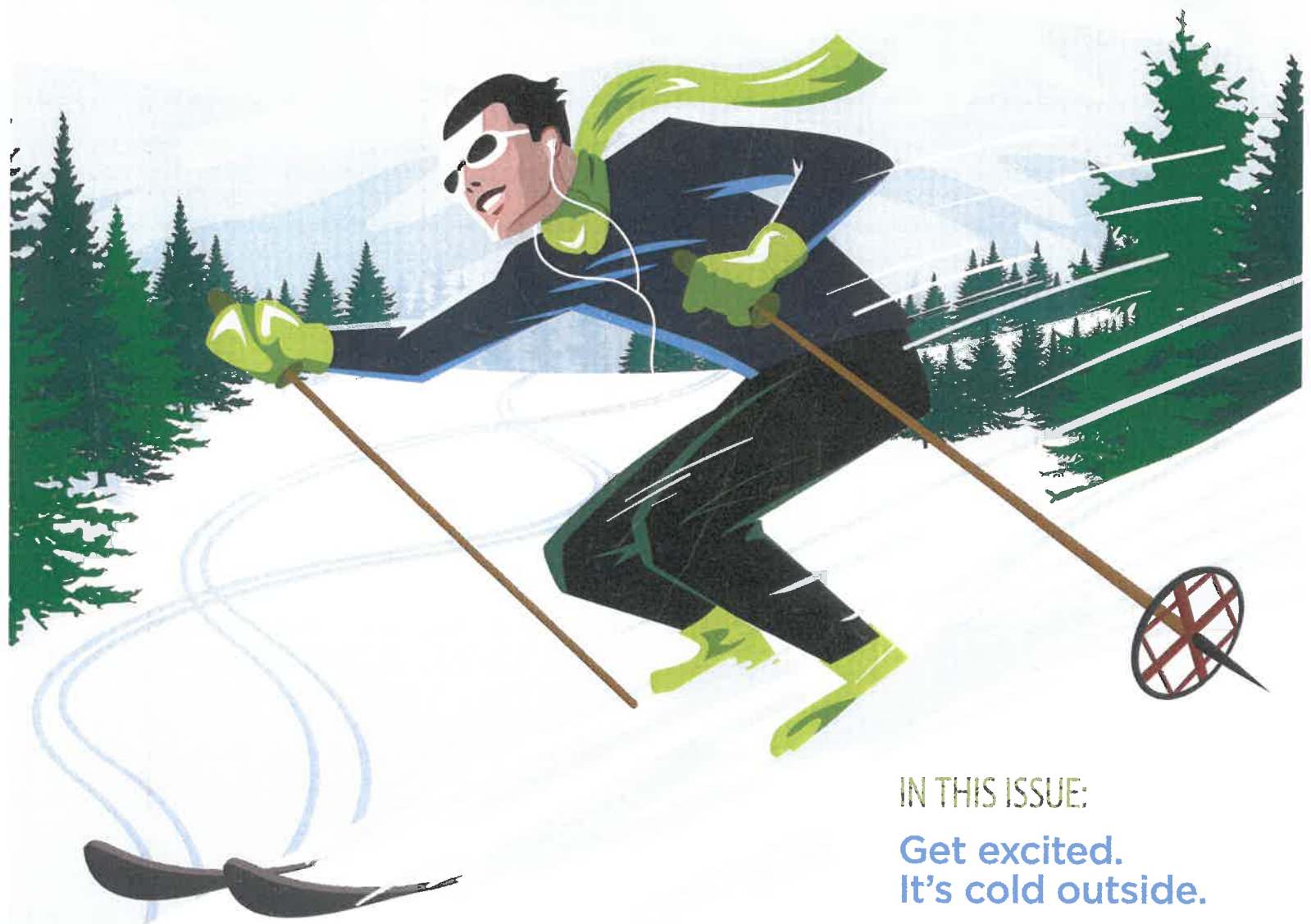
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their best.