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Articles

Black Ice Pond Hockey, WinterFest to take over capital city this weekend

By Jon Bodell - Jan 22, 2019 | 0 comments



Candace Fitzgerald and Josh Craggy dance a punk litterbug during the "Dancing with the Concord Stars" program at NHTI's annual Winter Fling event on Saturday, Jan. 27, 2018. (ELIZABETH FRANTZ / Monitor staff) Elizabeth Frantz

Previous

Next

It's definitely starting to get colder out there now, but the scene in the capital city will be red hot this weekend as three big-time events combine for one gigantic winter celebration.

Back for a ninth year is the ever-popular 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship, which takes place on the frozen pond at White Park. This tournament attracts hundreds of players from all over the country, and it's become a big weekend for family fun in Concord.

To go along with the tournament, for the first time, the city is partnering with several local organizations to put on Winter Fest, a series of events and activities downtown meant to complement the pond hockey tournament.

Finally, NHTI will also host its ninth annual Winter Fling on Saturday. The main event of the Winter Fling is the famous "Dancing With the Concord Stars" competition, featuring *Monitor* ad representative Jeanne Lester as one of the contestants.

There's a lot to get through here, so we're going to break this weekend (and by weekend we mean basically Wednesday through Sunday) down into the three separate events - even though they're kind of all related - just to provide some sense of organization. Use this three-page spread as your official guide to all things winter fun in Concord this week and weekend.

Black Ice Pond Hockey, WinterFest to take over capital city this weekend

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The 1883 Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship – affectionately referred to simply as Black Ice – has become a marquee event in Concord that many folks look forward to all year. The tournament is a tribute to the legend of the first-ever organized hockey game played in the United States, which took place at St. Paul's School on Nov. 17, 1883. The tournament aims to promote, maintain and expand ice skating opportunities at the local level to celebrate the city's rich hockey heritage.

The tournament has expanded in size and popularity every year of its existence, and with the advent of Winter Fest, this year seems poised to yet again be the biggest one to date.

This year's tournament will feature 95 teams across nine divisions. It's not at all uncommon to see teams from as far away as Alaska participate in the tournament, though teams are mostly from New Hampshire.

The Black Ice festivities begin Wednesday with a welcoming reception for players, sponsors and volunteers at O Steaks & Seafood. Attendees will enjoy a nice dinner in the upstairs function room of O's, providing scenic views of downtown.

Thursday will feature Thursday Night Lights, in which Concord Youth Hockey, the New England Wildcats, the New Hampshire Avalanche and the New Hampshire Junior Monarchs will play some pond hockey games ahead of the tournament.

On Friday, the tournament begins in earnest, with games going from 9 a.m. to 8:20 p.m. across the eight rinks set up on the frozen pond. Friday night will also have a fireworks display provided by Atlas Fireworks at 7:15 p.m.

Games continue on Saturday with matches running from 8 a.m. to 7:20 p.m. The final games of the tournament will be played on Sunday between 9 a.m. and noon.

All of this, of course, is pending good (cold and dry) weather – one of the unfortunate signatures of this tournament in the past has been the ever-moving start date due to less-than-ideal temperatures and ice conditions. As of now, though, things are looking like they'll be on schedule (knock on wood!).

"The forecast does look like we might maintain some pretty good weather for maintaining the ice," said Chris Brown, organizer of the tournament. "Wednesday and Thursday might have some winter weather, Friday looks like mid-20s, Saturday looks like mid-20s, so those are good temperatures to do this."

If you're not playing in the tournament – it's way, way too late to sign up by now – there's still plenty to keep you entertained all weekend long.

The heated spectator tent will be open all throughout the tournament, offering family interactive games, sweet Black Ice merchandise, a silent auction and a place to just warm up for a few minutes. There will also be bonfires burning each day of the tournament.

If you're hungry, there will be three food trucks out there as well. Brown said last year was the first time trying the food truck idea, and everybody seemed to love it so they've brought it back.

If it kills you to have to just stand there and watch everyone else have all the fun, there will be a chance for public skating on the pond from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday. Friday night will also see Concord Youth Hockey Dynamites and the New Hampshire Junior Monarchs practice on the ice from 5:30 to 7.

Saturday will feature the Youth Hockey Shiny Tournament for kids 8 and under from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The youth games will be played on smaller rinks set apart from the main rinks. There will also be a rock wall provided by Evo Rock + Fitness.

"It's all great opportunities for the kids to experience the whole tournament," Brown said.

One big issue that always arises with this tournament is parking. White Park has a pretty small parking lot for an event of this magnitude, and parking in general is at a premium in the city, especially around the downtown area.

That's why there will be a couple shuttle buses running throughout the tournament. The buses will primarily be used to bring people back and forth from the park to downtown (in order to take part in plenty of the Winter Fest activities – more on that shortly), but they will not have formal routes and/or schedules.

Instead, the shuttles will be on an on-call basis. The phone numbers will be provided to anybody who would like to use the shuttle service. Brown said he's even had people get dropped off right at their house.

While this pretty much covers all of the Black Ice details, if you're looking for even more info, including a detailed schedule and some history of the event, go to blackicepondhockey.com.

Winter Fest



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This year will feature the city's first-ever Winter Fest – not to be confused with the Winter Carnival, which is still a few weeks away. Winter Fest is a way to get more of the city – chiefly, the downtown core – involved in the tournament and to offer more entertaining and family-friendly activities to the community.

"We wanted to create a downtown event to complement Black Ice, which is such a success," said Jayme Simoes with Louis Karno & Co., the PR firm handling media relations for the festival. "It gives people more options. It's part of a trend we're seeing in Concord where you take one event and try to wrap a bigger catchment area around it."

Jamie Simchik, owner of the new Hotel Concord, was one of the main driving forces behind Winter Fest.

"We just thought this was an opportunity," Simchik said. "We tried to work with Chris Brown with Black Ice and NHTI (which hosts the Winter Fling on Saturday) to make sure we didn't erode any of their work but rather complement it. This is the first year, and we'll see how it goes."

O Steaks & Seafood is fully on board with Black Ice and Winter Fest – the restaurant is playing host to the Black Ice welcome reception. But it doesn't stop there – O's will also have an ice bar out on the patio, complete with an ice luge, that will be available Wednesday through Saturday from 4 to 10 p.m. Unlike some of the ice luges you may have used back in college, this will not be one of those deals where you stick your mouth right on the ice while your buddy pours half a bottle of moonshine down it. Instead, a bartender will pour cocktails and spirits down the luge into a glass – no saliva exchange or ice-burnt lips necessary.

Cheers, always closely linked to the tournament, will also have an ice bar again, meaning you'll have two options to order some extra-cold drinks. Brown doesn't seem to think there's any problem with having two ice bars downtown associated with Black Ice.

"The more, the merrier," he said.

One of the traditional elements of Black Ice that will play a big role in Winter Fest is beer. 603 Brewery is the official brewer of the tournament, and this year has not one but two special brews made just for the tournament – Black Ice American Ale and Knuckle Puck IPA.

The Black Ice American Ale will be available on tap, while supplies last, at: Common Man, Cheers, Barley House, Tandy's, Buffalo Wild Wings, Margaritas, Dos Amigos, El Rodeo, TGI Friday's, O's, The Red Blazer, Area 23, Chuck's BARbershop, The Granite Restaurant, Vibes Gourmet Burgers and The Gaslighter. Knuckle Puck will be on tap at The 99, Penuche's, Barley House, Dos Amigos, Margarita's, True Brew Barista and O's. The beers will be available in cans at select stores, too.

While not the official brewer of the tournament, Concord Craft Brewing Co. also has a Black Ice-themed beer called Pond Hockey Pilsner. That will be available at Barley House, Angelina's and True Brew.

Other elements of Winter Fest include an ice sculpture carving contest, cornhole tournaments to benefit charity, warm-up stations with hot cocoa and maybe – just maybe – a surprise visit from an NHL player.

Here's a quick schedule of Winter Fest events (with some Black Ice-specific items included):

Wednesday

- Ice Bar with luge at O Steaks & Seafood: 4-10 p.m.
- Black Ice Pond Hockey Welcome Reception: 5:30-7:30 p.m. at O's.

Thursday

- Ice Bar with luge at O Steaks & Seafood: 4-10 p.m.

Friday

- Intown Concord Outdoor Activities: Late afternoon/early evening
- Demonstration ice carving on Main Street: Late afternoon/early evening
- Ice Bar with luge at O Steaks & Seafood: 4-10 p.m.
- Cornhole Tournament: 4 p.m.

Saturday

- Intown Concord Outdoor Activities: Daylight hours
- Ice carving competition on Main Street: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Ice carving competition awards at ice bar at O Steaks & Seafood: 3 p.m.
- Winter Shopping Stroll at Concord's boutiques and shops

- Family activities, including a Cornhole Tournament and finals, a surprise appearance by an NHL player and more: All day
- Warm-up stations offering hot cocoa and s'mores: All day
- Ice Bar with luge at O Steaks & Seafood: 4-10 p.m.

NHTI Winter Fling

Back for its own ninth year is NHTI's Winter Fling. The Winter Fling, to be held Saturday, is one of the yearly highlights at Concord's community college, consisting of an evening full of fine food and a whole lot of dancing.

The night begins with Concord By the Bite & Sip from 5:30 to 7 p.m. This will offer attendees the chance to sample dishes and drinks from local restaurants, breweries and wineries.

Then, at 7 p.m., comes the main event: Dancing with the Concord Stars. This event has become wildly popular, as Concord "celebrities" take the stage and show off their best moves in a wildly entertaining contest – for as much fun as the audience has, contestants tend to take it pretty seriously, as former *Monitor* ad representative Candace Fitzgerald did last year when she competed with Lucky's Barbershop owner Jogh Craggy.

The event has sold out every year since its inception in 2011 – yes, this year's show is already sold out – raising more than \$350,000 for the President's Fund for Excellence, which underwrites student scholarships and helps fund the college's highest priority needs.

While you can't go unless you've already gotten tickets, you'll surely want to know who wins – check back here next week to find out.

In the meantime, here are the contestants (one is a *Monitor* staffer!):

- Sara Brehm (Northeast Delta Dental) and Mike Burney (Pats Peak Ski Area)
- Kristin Clark (Merrimack County Savings Bank) and Anthony Poore (New Hampshire Humanities)
- Ryan and Michael Hvizda (The Hvizda Team, Keller Williams Realty)
- Jeanne Lester (*Concord Monitor*) and Mark Lester (Eastern Bank)
- Bryanna Marceau (Greater Concord Chamber of Commerce) and Lucas Meyer (Preti Strategies)
- Anna Nygren (New York Life) and Michael Roundy (UMass Lowell)
- Sue O'Donnell (The Hotel Concord) and Anthony Mento (SMP Architecture)
- Tina Poirier (Division for Children, Youth and Families) and Dave Juvet (Business and Industry Association)
- Emily Ricard (Bar Harbor Bank and Trust) and Sam Durfee (City of Concord)
- Sarah Tilton (New Hampshire Ball Bearings) and Jason Bishop (NHTI)
- Nina Ann Timney (Nathan Wechsler and Co.) and Doug Phelan (Concord Hospital)

And just so NHTI knows, the *Insider* staff knows a thing or two about cuttin' a rug, too. Not that we're upset about never having been invited to participate before – we just felt it couldn't hurt to put that out there.

Now that that's out of the way, get out there and have as much winter fun as possible this week/weekend!

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Author: Jon Bodell

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