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JOHN TULLY / Monitor staff

Angela Perry (left) and Nici Ash of the all-female hockey team the Angry Pirates put on their skates before taking the ice at a backyard pond in Boscawen belonging to Stan Balch yesterday.

CONCORD

GETTING THAT TINGLE

As Black Ice tournament kicks off today, more female teams take the ice

By MEGAN DOYLE
Monitor staff

Beth Mayland is a hockey mom, but she doesn't stick to the cheering section.

The 43-year-old Hopkinton resident had watched enough pond hockey games in her backyard, where her three sons and her husband push the puck around all winter. So several years ago, she strapped on some skates and grabbed a stick herself.

"I got tired of watching everyone else play hockey," Mayland said.

This weekend, her sons, ages 9, 12 and 15, will watch their mom take to the ice during the Black Ice Pond Hockey Championship. Her team – the Hellcats – will compete in a bracket with eight other women's teams, the greatest number of female participants the tournament has seen yet.

The fourth annual competition kicks off at White Park today and continues through the weekend, ending with championship games Sunday morning. Chris Brown, one of the founders of the nonprofit Black Ice Pond Hockey Association and president of New Hampshire Distributors, said the event has become a staple for winter entertainment in Concord.

"It's something that people look forward to," Brown said. "After that first year, you saw the kind of ambiance and awe of the event occurring down there. . . . I really hear from so many people that it's a wonderful use of the park."



JOHN TULLY / Monitor staff

The Angry Pirates Black Ice Pond Hockey team practices on the backyard pond.

Brown, a Concord resident, learned to skate on the ice at White Park as a kid. He and some friends started this pond hockey tournament in 2010 as the key event in a private-public partnership, run by the nonprofit that donates much of its proceeds to city projects and youth hockey programs in the area.

"We hope to raise around, I would think, \$40,000 from an event like this," Brown said. "Some of it we are putting toward the potential new skate house to be built at White Park. . . . We want to make

White Park a better place than when we came."

He remembered the first day of the first tournament, which began with a ceremonial drop of the puck on the pond. As the teams and spectators lined up to watch the puck fall, Brown said he could feel the start of a unique tradition in Concord – whether it was the cold or something more.

"You got that tingle," he said.

This year, 39 teams signed up to play. Nine of those teams are part of the women's bracket – a jump from only five last year.

Among those lady skaters are the GAL-oots, and Cathy Menard. She's been playing hockey since her father, a college hockey coach at St. Lawrence University in New York, taught her as a little girl, and she has competed in the Black Ice tournament every year since it began.

"It's such a joyful game," said Menard, 53. "Especially pond hockey, you're outside. You're in the fresh air. It's a

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Panel mulls equal pay legislation

Bill would allow for discussion of wages

By LAURA McCRYSTAL
Monitor staff

A bill allowing employees to discuss their wages with co-workers would eliminate pay inequity between men and women, supporters said during a public hearing yesterday. But Republicans expressed skepticism about the bill's necessity, making it unclear whether it will pass the Republican-controlled Senate.

Sen. Sylvia Larsen, a Concord Democrat and the bill's prime sponsor, said it would close loopholes in the existing equal pay law. Under current state law, employers must pay men and women equally if they are equally qualified, but can prohibit employees from discussing their pay.

"So how in the heck does a woman know she's not getting paid equally?" Larsen asked.

Sen. Andy Sanborn, a Bedford Republican, questioned whether the law is needed. He noted that it is already il-

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legal to pay men and women different salaries based solely on gender.

"Do you know of any companies that are breaking the law today?" asked Sanborn, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee. "Because . . . the law's pretty clear."

Three complaints have been filed with the state Department of Labor since 2000, said Commissioner Jim Craig. But women who believe they are being paid unfairly based on gender can also file a case in superior court, he said.

Larsen and the bill's other supporters cited data yesterday from the U.S. Census Bureau, indicating that women who are employed full-time earn 77 percent as much as men. They said changes are needed to

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CONCORD

Double jeopardy argued in river assault conviction

Defense: Charges almost identical

By JEREMY BLACKMAN
Monitor staff

Nearly three years after Jamie Locke was mistakenly acquitted of conspiring to murder a Concord homeless man by pitching his unconscious body into the Merrimack River, and little more than one year after she was convicted of a lesser charge in the same attack, her lawyer yesterday asked the state Supreme Court to free her on grounds of double jeopardy.

Locke, 37, was found guilty in 2012 of second-degree assault and sentenced last year to 3½ to seven years in state prison. On appeal, her defense claims the charge is nearly identical to one previously tried in court – of first-degree assault – and therefore a violation of her right against retrial for the same crime.

A jury initially acquitted Locke on the conspiracy and first-degree assault charges, but it was later learned that their foreman had misread the verdict; jurors had intended to convict her of the same crime.

See **JEOPARDY** – A5



GAY MARRIAGE moves closer to gaining its first foothold in the South after Virginia's attorney general says

PAY Continued from A1

strengthen the existing law and close that gap.

"It exists in our state, it exists in our nation and we know that on average, a woman's taking home far less as an average wage than her male counterpart," Larsen said.

Sen. Sam Cataldo said he has always paid male and female employees equally if they had the same position and level of experience. Cataldo, a Farmington Republican, said he has not seen evidence of companies breaking the existing law.

"I don't see the systemic (problem)," Cataldo said. "Nobody's showed me that yet."

The bill's supporters suggested that women may not be able to complain about their unequal pay because they are not permitted to discuss it, or because they are not aware of their protections under the law.

Judy Stadtman of New Hampshire AFL-CIO said the bill would "remove workplace barriers that prevent women from being fully informed about their pay status."

The bill would allow employees to discuss their pay with co-workers, require employers to include equal pay information on posters displayed in the workplace and fine employers up to \$10,000 for violating the law. The version introduced yesterday allows imprisonment for up to six months on a second offense, though Larsen said she intends to remove that portion of the bill.

Sanborn released a statement saying he agrees with Larsen that better data and clearer information from the Department of Labor are needed. He did not express support for the bill.

"We certainly shouldn't need to pass a law to get the Department of Labor to post New Hampshire's Equal Pay protections more prominent-

Three complaints have been filed with the state Department of Labor since 2000, said Commissioner Jim Craig. But women who believe they are being paid unfairly based on gender can also file a case in superior court, he said.

ly on its website, but if that's what it takes, we will," he said.

The bill is co-sponsored by every Democratic senator, House Speaker Terie Norelli and other Democratic state representatives. Democratic Gov. Maggie Hassan also supports the proposed legislation.

"Ensuring that both women and men can earn equal pay for an equal day's work is essential to our economic future," Hassan wrote in a letter to the Senate Commerce Committee. "We must reduce the strain that pay disparity puts on thousands of families and help strengthen our middle class."

A similar bill is also proposed in the Democratic-controlled House this year.

(Laura McCrystal can be reached at 369-3312 or lmccrystal@cmonitor.com or on Twitter @lmccrystal.)

HOCKEY Continued from A1

gliding, fluid game. Whoever's got the most heart, wins."

Menard played on a women's hockey team in college, when she said her squad had few competitors in the area. But when she and some friends organized a women's hockey league in the 1980s, the chance to play drew female players from across the state.

"Sixty women showed up the first night," she said.

Over the years, other area clubs popped up in Nashua and Laconia, Menard said. The club she helped start grew into the Concord Nor'Easters, a recreational hockey league for women. She doesn't skate with that group anymore, but she still loves the sport.

"It has a bad rap as being really tough if you look on TV, but especially the way women play, it's more of a skating game," Menard said.

When Nici Ash of Bristol signed up to play with her team this weekend, she knew how to skate. But that's it.

"It's a little bit different when you get a stick in your hand," said Ash, 40.

Ash heard about the tournament because some of the men she works with at Unifit field several pond hockey teams at the White Park competition. This year, her team – the Angry Pirates – is ready to compete in the women's bracket.

And tonight, the co-workers will face off on the pond after tournament play is over – "an exhibition game," Ash said.

"It's all for fun. . . I'm just looking forward to getting out and seeing how the whole thing works there," she said. "It sounds like a great event."

The Angry Pirates got their gear from Capital Sporting Goods in Concord, where owner Dave Palisi said he has seen programs such as Concord Youth Hockey open more options to girls than in years past.

As more girls' and women's teams crop up, Palisi said he sees more female players in-

No refs, no rants – and NO FIGHTING!

The Black Ice tournament is played by old-fashioned, do-it-yourself pond hockey rules. The official version is at blackicepondhockey.com. Here's our take:

- **THINK SMALL.** Only four players per team on the ice, not six.
- **THINK FAST.** Two periods, not three; 15 minutes each, not 20.
- **SCORE!** And score again! Teams score by shooting the puck into slots at either corner of a long wooden box. There are no goalies.
- **COUNT** on your fingers and you'll run out. One game last year was 30-3, and double-digit tallies are common.
- **CONFESS YOUR SINS.** Players referee themselves, with a game monitor on hand to keep score, watch the time and confirm calls.
- **BE GOOD TO THE GAME MONITOR!** Get rude . . . and you're off the ice and out of the tournament.
- **NO TRIPPING,** hooking, slashing, elbowing, body-checking, slap shots, high sticks or lifting the puck high in the air. Got that? Offend and your team loses the puck.
- **NO FIGHTING!** Get rough and your team loses the puck . . . and you're out of the tournament, leaving your team to play one person short. Good luck with that!
- **KEEP THE ICE CLEAN,** too. No Zamboni machines to smooth the surface. Players are expected to shovel the ice after each game.
- **ACCEPT LIFE'S UNEXPECTED BOUNCES.** It's pond ice, not arena ice, and like any of us, it's not perfect.

Photo by JOHN TULLY

Graphic by CHARLOTTE THIBAUT / Monitor staff

terested in the sport and its nuances.

"It's not a rough-and-tumble game as much as it is a skill game (for female players)," Palisi said.

Tournament play starts today at 9 a.m., and there is no charge for spectators. Full schedules and scores are available online at blackicepondhockey.com.

Mayland, who skates with the Nor'Easters, said the club always welcomes new players who want to learn the sport. And in her own family, she might have a budding female hockey player.

"We play as a family out in the backyard," she said. "Even my 5-year-old daughter is starting to get around on

skates pretty well."

Her little girl could grow up to be a competitor in the Black Ice tournament, too, someday.

"So far, it looks like it," Mayland said.

(Megan Doyle can be reached at 369-3321 or madoyle@cmonitor.com or on Twitter @megan_e_doyle.)

AG's office still awaiting Fuller Oil documents

Official says records are not complete

By DAVID BROOKS
Telegraph

The attorney general's office is still waiting for financial documents from Fuller Oil Co. regarding "pre-buy" contracts, as part of its investigation into delivery problems by the state's largest provider of home heating oil.

"They did provide information, responding to our request, yesterday. But it's not complete. . . . We need more information, and they have agreed to provide that," said James Boffetti, senior assis-

tant attorney general for consumer affairs.

Boffetti's office has required evidence that Fuller Oil, which delivers heating oil and propane to tens of thousands of New Hampshire residences, covering an estimated one-third of the residential market, demonstrate that it bought enough of what are known as futures contracts to ensure the delivery of heating fuels to people who had paid for it in advance, both this winter and next winter.

"I don't think I have a full understanding yet of his delivery problem," said Boffetti yesterday. "He clearly had phone problems that were legitimate – not of his doing, not

FairPoint's doing, caused by equipment problems. I'm puzzled as to why he didn't come up with another way to allow his customers to get in touch with him . . . why it took 10 days to resolve this problem."

Just after the New Year, some customers began complaining to officials and the news media that Fuller Oil was failing to make some automatic refills and could not be reached by telephone or other means, leaving people with little or no heating fuel as temperatures plunged during the "polar vortex" cold snap. The complaints escalated to the point that the state established a hotline staffed by state workers to help han-

dle calls from customers.

Fuller Oil has blamed the situation on weather-related difficulties compounded by a failed phone system that for about 10 days made it difficult or impossible for customers to reach the company's six offices across New Hampshire, including its central office in Hudson. An official statement released by the company last week blamed media coverage for causing "panic" among customers.

Dozens of customers, unable to reach Fuller Oil for days, called the newspapers for answers as they watched their oil tanks run dry during the cold weather. Some called other oil companies for deliv-

eries after Fuller trucks never arrived.

"I don't think the phone problems alone explain all of the delivery problems he had. I don't yet have a satisfactory answer to that question," Boffetti said. "I am hoping that he learned very valuable lessons from this. It obviously created a very dangerous situation."

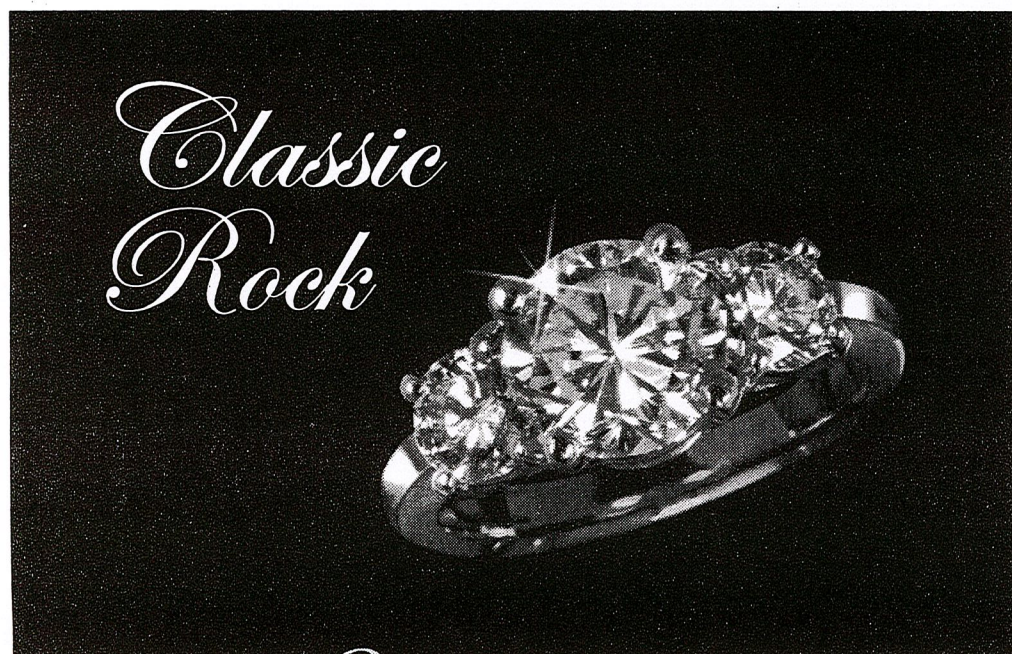
Futures contracts are the most common way that New Hampshire heating oil companies cover future purchases of oil – that is, if a customer pre-pays for a set amount of oil, the dealer buys a futures contract for that amount, which guarantees that the oil will be available in the future

at a certain price.

New Hampshire has seen a few cases in the past in which a heating oil company went out of business without having pre-purchased enough oil for all its pre-purchased customer contracts, leaving some people stranded. In December 2009, for example, Flynn's Oil of Exeter went bankrupt and more than 300 of its customers lost a total of \$550,000 in money paid into pre-buy contracts.


Some states require heating oil delivery firms to have more solid financial backing for pre-buy contracts, such as escrow accounts, but New Hampshire has not followed suit.

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