

Dorset Park Skating Association (DPSA) History

Background in Brief: Back in the late 1980's and early 1990's, skating was accelerating in popularity among local youth, most notably a demand for kids' ice hockey throughout the greater Chittenden County area. While the popularity of the sport was rapidly increasing, the ice surfaces available were essentially three in number: Burlington's Leddy Park, Essex Junction's rink at the school complex, and the St. Albans rink, a half hour north. UVM's Gutterson Field House offered very limited availability due to UVM demands for ice time. Based on the increasing demand, the following occurred, eventually leading to the construction of Cairns Arena #1.

History, Chronological, 1994 - Present:

- The supply of ice time for the increasing demand had maxed out; with local high school and youth hockey programs vying for the limited ice time; practices and youth hockey games were scheduled in the wee hours of the morning to the late hours of the evening, a situation that led to hockey organizers and parents to actively seek new ice. Figure skating was also greatly pressured by the lack of available ice for skating.
- After much deliberation in the communities in the area, South Burlington's skating enthusiasts, in support of perhaps the largest number of young skaters in the region, took the lead in pursuing new ice, in the form of proposing a new rink at Dorset Park, perhaps the largest expanse of open recreational lands in the immediate area. Funding was stimulated when Tony Cairns, owner of Champlain Oil, stepped up to the plate and pledged \$500,000, if the balance of the funding could be raised publicly. The public funding was sought via a bonding vote in South Burlington that was defeated, effectively killing the project.
- The project languished for a short period, until a group of hockey enthusiasts, former players – now parents, and other parents of young skaters; all members of the CSB (Chittenden South Burlington) youth hockey organization, decided to revisit the situation. Tony Cairns was again approached to determine if he would consider the \$500,000 donation if private funding, raised privately, could raise the funds necessary to secure bank financing to move the project forward. Tony agreed, a working committee was formed, consisting substantially of individuals who continue today, after fifteen years of volunteering, to serve on the DPSA Board.
- Through the generosity of multiple individuals, all respected business people with a diversity of expertise – lawyer, accountant, architect, engineer, banker, and others, “The Plan” was created to move the project forward. The plan consisted of aggressive fund-raising, an agreement for ownership and operating structure with an enthusiastic and supportive City of South Burlington, bank financing approval, and design and construction of an arena.
- Between late 1994 and early 1995 (approximate dates) plans for construction were completed, money raised, and permits acquired, enabling construction to begin in the spring of 1995. The key to this success was a private fund-raising campaign that raised approximately \$1.3 million in a period of approximately six months, to meet financing requirements.

- Construction began in the spring of 1995 and the rink opened in October of 1995, **one year start to finish for all aspects of the Cairns #1 arena – fund-raising, design, permitting, operating agreements, and construction, a phenomenal success story!**
- Cairns Arena was a super success story from Day One! It exemplified a well-planned and unique public – private partnership with the municipality, financing structure with the bank, and operating entity in the form of Dorset Park Skating Association. From the first day, General Manager Bob L’Ecuyer has been the hands-on guiding force who has managed the facility efficiently and successfully, balancing the needs of multiple user groups, ensuring that pretty much everyone who needs ice time gets it!
- The Cairns Arena was also creative in controlling operating costs from Day One. Energy efficiency was achieved through assistance and financial incentives from Vermont Gas, as well as assistance from Green Mountain Power. Later efficiencies based on incentives included installation of energy efficient lighting over both arena surfaces. Sponsorships also saved money up-front, such as the score boards generously gifted by Pepsi’s Skip Farrell. Efficiency Vermont has recognized Cairns Arena for successfully achieving energy efficiencies.
- Amazingly, demand for ice time at Cairns quickly exceeded the availability of ice time, a result of the continuing growth of ice-related sports and events in the immediate area. Additionally, Cairns Arena was a superior facility aesthetically as well as in ice quality, locker room space, clean rest rooms, and user friendly cafeteria. Also, the location was far more convenient for South Burlington’s skaters, as well as those from immediately surrounding towns, than traveling to arenas at Leddy Park or in Essex Junction.
- A mere few years after Cairns #1 opened, the DPSA Board, essentially the same group as successfully managed the development of C-1, began the process a second time to enable Cairns Rink #2 to be constructed. To expedite the process of potentially constructing a second ice surface, Tony Cairns and Bob L’Ecuyer attended a SB City Council meeting in April of 1998, providing an update on the immediate success of our arena, its benefits to the community, etc. Tony explained that we (DPSA) were considering adding an ice surface. City Council was unanimously supportive of the idea of adding another ice surface.
- Essentially, the same planning, financing, and development process was repeated, again in a short time frame, that led to an opening of Cairns #2 in October of 2001. **The Cairns dual ice rink complex was quickly recognized as the best in northern New England!**

Rink Use: The Cairns two-rink complex is a year round center of activity. Ice hockey is the dominant use, but the rink accommodates multiple users:

- College Hockey: Cairns Arena is the home ice for St. Michael’s College D-III hockey. SMC was a major donor to C-2 and has dedicated locker rooms on site at C-2.
- High School Hockey: Cairns is the home ice for South Burlington, Rice, and Champlain Valley Union High School varsity boys and girls teams.
- Youth Hockey: Cairns is the home ice for the CSB youth hockey organization, today including about 500 local kids, enthusiastic skaters from the time they can lace up skates (actually, have a parent lace up skates), through much of high school.
- Hockey Camps: Multiple hockey camps, today including Boston Bruins’ goalie and UVM star

goalie Tim Thomas' summer camp, keep the rinks humming through the summer season.

- **Tournaments:** Tournaments are money makers for the host organizations; CSB and others host multiple tournaments throughout the year at Cairns. Some tournaments are regional, others national, and, more than one might imagine, are international in nature. Tournaments can attract multiple dozen teams; see Economic Impact below.
- **Figure Skating:** Cairns is the home to a number of figure skaters and organizations. DPSA Board member Vicki Hildebrand successfully advocates for figure skating recognition and appreciation, ensuring that figure skaters' needs for ice time are met. On an interesting note, one young former hockey skater, transformed to figure skater, who trained at Cairns, recently captured second place in the U.S. Figure Skating Championships and is a potential Olympic Team candidate for the Sochi Olympics.
- **Curling:** Increasingly popular in the USA, the age defying sport of Curling has found a place at Cairns Arenas. Now an annual event, the local curling club and enthusiasts purchase all the ice time on a mid-March weekend and hold a tournament to benefit a local not for profit organization.
- **Public Skating:** Cairns Arenas meets the needs of local social skaters who simply want to spend some fun time on the ice. Over the years, the optimum times for public skating have been identified and public skating is scheduled at these times. Utilization varies depending on the time of year.
- **Stick and Puck** is a regularly scheduled block of time that enables young hockey and figure skaters to skate without organization in order to log some ice miles and to practice their respective sports in an informal format. Both boys and girls are attracted to Stick and Puck for a nominal per time fee.
- **Parties:** Lots and lots of birthday parties for youngsters are held at the rinks, most often consisting of ice time and then a pizza party and/or cake and ice cream. Note that the completion of the rink's Entryway project will expand the opportunities for the rinks to host parties for local kids because the food service capacity for preparation and seating will both expand.
- **Other Uses:** The rinks are available for most any viable use, simply by reserving and paying for ice time; the rink is flexible about the off-ice celebrations, most often depending on what else is competing for the time and space.

Economic and Social Impacts: The Cairns Arenas complex is an economic success! Constructed 100% with private funding and managed efficiently, **the Cairns Arenas complex has had a tremendously positive financial and social impact on South Burlington, its businesses and its residents.**

- The rinks were constructed and are managed and operated with zero public funding! No public dollars have ever been contributed to the Cairns Arenas complex. More than \$2 million in private funding was raised to construct the two ice arenas!
- DPSA has operated for fifteen years, in compliance at all times within the requirements of our bank financing, including the set-asides for major repairs.
- Socially, it is important to recognize that this substantial complex in a very central location has generated all positive reviews from users; in fact, no user or neighbor has ever made a substantive complaint about the rinks as to crowding, noise, and safety. The DPSA Board is proud that the complex has been operated virtually 100% successfully!

- The Cairns facility provides informal services to users of Dorset Park, especially in the form of accessible clean restrooms throughout the outdoor sports seasons, as well as access to food and drinks during the same periods. The number of kids coming in for restroom use and snacks is a steady stream on many warm season days. DPSA absorbs the added maintenance and staffing costs created by this substantial use, recognizing the benefits to Park users of having a convenient place to meet their needs, and a dry roof on rainy days as well!
- The Cairns complex first employed five full time and fourteen part time workers in 1995. With the opening of C-2 in 2001, the full time staff increased to eight and the part time to nineteen. That number is essentially the same in 2010. Staff comes from a mix of communities, but there is a preponderance of part time staff from South Burlington, most often high schoolers working after school and/or on weekends, as well as local college students home for a break, or over the summer. The Cairns complex contributes to the economic health of the community by hiring locally.
- Every tournament at Cairns that brings in visiting teams from out of the area results in the use of hotel rooms. **Cairns Arenas recommends only lodging accommodations and restaurants located in South Burlington.** In 2010, it is estimated that tournaments contributed to the rental of 22,547 hotel room nights and more than 44,000 meals served in local restaurants. These same room guests then spent money in South Burlington retail stores and service stations. The economic impact is tremendous and is of specific benefit to the successful operation of South Burlington businesses and also directly to the South Burlington treasury through the 1% South Burlington tax on rooms, food, beverage, and retail sales.
- On any given day, with use of the arenas by people locally and from around the area, these users also choose to go out to eat, or purchase gas in South Burlington, leaving more money in South Burlington businesses and more money for the South Burlington tax coffers.
- The average expenditure of an individual traveling overnight in an area away from home is estimated by U.S. Travel (DC based national travel statistics compiler) at \$154.57 per person per day in 2010. If room use averages three people to a room, a realistic average for skating tournament occupancy of a hotel room, and if we conservatively reduce the daily expenditure to \$100 per person to allow for market differences, the total estimated dollar impact on the local community is more than \$6,000,000 dollars in one year!
- **Perhaps of greatest benefit to the City of South Burlington, the physical rink complex is the property of South Burlington, a “gift” from DPSA, for which the City paid nothing! DPSA believes the complex is now valued in excess of \$6 million!** This, while costing the City nothing!

Today and Next: The Cairns Arenas complex today thrives and is busy the entire year. The complex was envisioned at the beginning, fifteen years ago, as a work in progress, a work that began with one skating surface, evolved to two, and was to be completed with the construction of a unifying “Entryway” that would not only complete the complex aesthetically, but also enable the complex to add to and improve its services, also generating optimum economic activity that would have direct economic impact on South Burlington businesses and ripple throughout the greater community, multiplying the economic impact of the complex to the local area.

A central “Entryway” would correct a variety of small problems created with two ice surfaces separated by a long distance. A new Entryway would be located central to both rinks. It would provide an improved entrance pedestrian flow, a far more aesthetically appealing entrance to the arenas enhancing the complex’s visual appearance as a primary facility within Dorset Park, add a ticket counter, much

needed expanded cafeteria seating out of the main traffic flow, meeting space available to the public, a new more efficient rink office, and other operating efficiencies. An Entryway would enable the complex to host more local special events and gatherings, all for the benefit of local users, most often South Burlington residents. As with the two ice surfaces, the Entryway project would not tap into any public money for funding. However, the Entryway project, as of mid-spring 2011, is in limbo due to proposed changes in the rink-city relationship by South Burlington City Management; changes which are not agreeable to the DPSA Board of Directors.

The Cairns complex will continue to thrive and be a success story, with or without the planned Entryway, but minus the Entryway it will remain incomplete and it will not achieve its fullest potential of social and economic contributions to the community. This would be a major disappointment and a disservice to the community in the view of the DPSA Board members, the majority of whom have served since the inception of the project back in 1994, providing valuable services.

In conclusion of this historical brief, it is also important to note that no Board member has received any financial remuneration for the hundreds of hours of service rendered to this community gem. Looking to the immediate future, it is the DPSA Board and Management's view that the Entryway project should commence without further delay, completing the work in time for the rinks to co-host the International Ice Hockey Federation's Women's World Ice Hockey Championship, a major international skating event, April 8 – 16, 2012. The Entryway project signifies the culmination of fifteen years' effort and the BOD is determined to complete the project, if possible, without jeopardizing the effective and efficient management of the complex. Such effective and efficient management has been the key to Cairns' success; continued operation adhering to the same high standards will ensure the future remains successful, providing hours of great sport and fun for all who enjoy this exceptional complex.

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