

Where there's a will, there's a RINK

Skaters can glide even around own back yards

By DAVID V. GRAHAM
Journal outdoor writer

SAT DEC 28 1991

Bob Perani, longtime owner of a Flint hockey shop and a former Flint Generals hockey player, remembers when he and some friends used to make their own hockey rink in a back yard in his native Toronto.

"We built the rink in this long, narrow back yard, and it had a slope," he said, grinning at the memory. "The team that got stuck on the downhill side always lost because the uphill team could just roll downhill."

That was a lot of back-yard rinks ago.

Perani, a former part-owner of the old Genesee Iceland indoor rink, has been building rinks off and on in his own back yard in Grand Blanc Township for more than 20 years, mostly for his son, Robert, 16, and his daughter, Lahna, 13.

And many customers come into his S. Dort Highway store looking for advice before building rinks themselves for the first time.

Perani said the best advice he can give about making a backyard rink is to be patient.

"A flood is much worse than putting down too little water," he said. "You gotta be patient and take your time. Putting down layer after layer over several nights is far better than flooding the area with three inches of water."

Perani said a good base is essential for smooth ice and a long-lasting rink that will survive those inevitable warm days.

Perani said a good base is essential for smooth ice and a long-lasting rink that will survive those inevitable warm days.

"A good preparation and base takes a long time," he said. "It can't be done overnight."

Perani said he has seen kits that pool owners can use to convert their swimming pools into skating rinks, but he said they cost about \$1,500.

Perani said that although it takes plenty of water to create a back-yard rink, it shouldn't cost much.

"It shouldn't use anything like watering the lawn in the summer uses," he said.

He suggested locating the backyard rink near a security light to provide lighting for night skating. And it is a good idea to avoid the rink altogether on warm days, he said.

"Skating on melting ice will ruin it right away."

Perani said he thinks local people don't build as many outdoor rinks as they used to, but said he blames the ups and downs of recent winter weather for that situation.

Flint's public outdoor rinks at Broome and Whaley parks are closed this year for financial reasons, according to Flint Parks Director Steve Waller.

"The only rink we have open this winter is the IMA Sports Arena," Waller said. "We will try to reopen the other two rinks next winter if financial conditions permit."

In addition to the city's IMA Sports Arena rink, the IMA does have its rink open at Memorial Park on Grand Traverse Street, Waller said.

Perani said he would like to see more public outdoor ice rinks built here by local fire departments and civic groups, as is common in Canada.

"Those rinks keep a lot of kids out of trouble," he



JOURNAL PHOTO/LINDA KAHLBAUGH

Damion Jacob (left), 11, and Austin Clarke, 15, both of Flint, practice their hockey moves on Thread Lake on Christmas Day.

said.

Here are some of Perani's best ideas on how to build a backyard rink for playing hockey or figure skating.

- Look for a flat, level spot. The minimum size for a rink for small children can be as small as 15 by 25 feet, but if you are planning to host fairly serious hockey games for children, it ought to be at least 30 by 50 feet.

- Most folks build their retaining walls with banks of snow, but for a more professional look or for an early jump on the season, stake out 2-by-6-inch boards for the walls.

- Although you can start spraying over your grass any night that it dips below freezing, Perani recommends putting down a layer of plastic first to smooth out the grass and rough spots even more. Some even

put a layer of sand down over the plastic and smooth it down with a lawn roller.

- Forget about flooding the area with lots of water. You are better off laying down lots of thin layers over several nights, Perani said.

- The best method for creating layers is to use a garden hose with a spray attachment. Spray thin layers over the previous layers, taking extra time to fill in the holes and weak spots with a combination of snow and water.

- Don't forget to store the hose indoors or inside a warm garage after using it. A frozen hose won't do you any good. Protect the outdoor faucet as well with a cover and a heat coil.

- Be sure to brush off any snow before you start spraying, as the snow will lump up the new ice.