

Report of an hour-long phone interview with Jennifer Hesse (312-654-2894), project head for the Hancock Observatory synthetic ice rink Chicago, Illinois

Development and Installation. The rink opened in 2010 and is in third season, which will end in April.

Material. The surface is eXtra-Ice, over a poured cement floor. The company installed the rink.

Size. 900 sq. ft. The rink can accommodate 18-20 skaters at a time. This small size accommodates children well, but adults find it too small to skate comfortably.

Skateability. Professionals tested the ice in the first season and found it took a few minutes to get used to the surface, but found it easy once they sensed the surface.

Cost. \$6/ half hour. Skate rental/ \$1.

Liability. The rink carries liability insurance. Each skater signs a liability waiver. Rules of the rink are prominently posted. In three years of operation there have been no injuries or claims. One young child cut his hand on a skate, but the cut was treated at the rink. The rink keeps 4 helmets and makes them available if parents want them for their kids. They have never had more than one in use at a time.

Shoe storage. The rink provides open cubbies to store shoes with a statement that shoe storage is at the patron's risk. There have been no incidents of stolen shoes. Three 9' benches have been adequate for parents to sit and skaters to put on skates.

Sharpening. Skates need to be sharpened after 12 hours of use. Jennifer bought a small skate sharpening unit and the eXtra-Ice people taught the staff to sharpen skates. There is enough down time for the staff to keep the skates sharpened.

Positive Features.

- 1) Kids liked being able to skate without being cold or wet from falls.
- 2) Each year has produced much positive PR coverage.
- 3) The rink has frequently been rented out for parties.

Negative Features.

1) The eXtra-Ice system requires application of a lubricant gel once or twice a week. Jennifer and her staff have found this to be a labor-intensive, tough, dirty job. The rink first has to be vacuumed to pick up tiny shavings of the plastic. Then, the staff must get down on hands and knees and apply the gel. Using mops wastes too much of the very expensive gel. This process takes two people about an hour on their small rink. After two

years the rink needed to be washed with soap and water. A light floor buffing restored to new condition.

2) On the advice of eXtra-Ice Jennifer bought heavy, expensive mats for skaters to walk on. These mats turn out to be heavy to move and largely unnecessary. She recommends light-weight inexpensive rubber mats.

Outlook for the Rink. Though the rink is physically holding up well, much competition has appeared in downtown Chicago. There are now two massive city-sponsored rinks and a free rink at Navy Pier. The Hancock rink has seen gradually decreasing use this year. Because of its small size it seems to be a one-time novelty – skating 1000 feet up looking down at the city of Chicago.

Conclusions. The Committee should make its rink large enough to satisfy adult skaters and stay away from skating rink material that requires application of a lubricant. Rental skates should be a feature from the beginning. On site sharpening is probably necessary.

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