

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Indian Hill Winter Club: From the Beginning Until Now – Part I



The Indian Hill Winter Club has been a vital asset to the community for almost two decades. The concept of the club and the story of its role in the Village and surrounding communities is a fascinating tale for what it shows about creative residents and their devotion to a cause.

One dreary January day in the early 2000s, after watching VCR reruns with his young family, Mike Collette conceived the idea of building a local ice rink to keep children active during the winter months. A native New Yorker, Collette had learned to skate at his hometown rink in Pawling, and then played ice hockey at Hotchkiss (team captain) and Dartmouth. Believing that this would be worth doing in Cincinnati, he gathered several friends to discuss the idea. Not many people knew what a “winter club” was, but soon a Steering Committee was established to explore the idea. It included Jamie Burchenal, Stuart Deadrick, Greg Foote, Cathy Gould, Marylou McIlwraith, Tim McKay, Ann Nash, Lynn Pierce, Tom Powers, Mark Sneider, Mike Wentz, and Tom Wilson. Each person brought unique talent to the effort. The group held regular meetings in Mike’s basement beginning in January 2002 to address issues such as where to locate the club, how to finance it, who to attract, and how to build community support.

Brochures were distributed to friends and neighbors. Informational tables were available at IHRC signups, and meetings and presentations were made to local groups. Many families were familiar with the benefits of the Indian Hill Swim Club in the summertime. The initial plan to build an outdoor rink got revised; it would need to be an indoor rink. Prospective members provided feedback which led to additional tweaks of the original plan. A basketball court was suggested. Paddle tennis courts would be a draw. A fitness center would attract members, particularly if it had a view of the rink. An area where there could be social gatherings would create camaraderie. So the building and site got bigger and bigger to accommodate people’s interests.

To build awareness and launch a membership drive, the Indian Hill Winter Club made a splash in the 2002 4th of July Parade, with an awesome float displaying a winter wonderland, with a snow machine spraying flakes, holiday music blasting from speakers, a rollerblading Frosty the Snowman, and lots of other kids and supporters rollerblading through the heart of the Village wearing “Got Ice” T-Shirts. What a sight! Potential members purchased \$100 deposits as plans for the club were drawn and redrawn to reflect their desires. The deposits were important in demonstrating widespread interest. Meanwhile the leaders pondered the location of the facility.

While there was a Plan B site in Miamiville, the IHWC organizers were hoping to secure property in the Village. Interested parties often inquired about where it would be. Mike Collette began discussions with the then City Manager Mike Burns to ascertain if there was any place in the Village for the new club. At that time, Indian Hill was in the process of acquiring the 379 acre parcel of land in Camp Dennison now known as Grand Valley. It was important for elected Village Council to know about the level of community support for the concept. Working with former Mayors Stella Hassan, Tom Rink, and Eppa Rixey, the organizers were persuasive in their efforts, demonstrating not just momentum but commitment. By autumn 2004 Council endorsed the IHWC and leased them 3.5 acres of land on Fletcher Road for 30 years. After Village approval, membership grew by leaps and bounds. To secure bank funding, four teams of members competed and solicited individuals. Collectively they raised \$500,000 in donations, providing collateral for a bank loan. The group secured commitments from 300 members, and some even joined at elevated lifetime membership levels. There was a celebration of the success of this fundraising effort at the Miami Boat Club, and team members who met their member recruitment goals received engraved plaques (adorned with Corona Bottles) for their efforts. The Winter Club would become a reality.

So the 50,000 square foot recreational facility was ready to be built, until the OEPA stalled the work process due to concerns with the septic system being close to the Village’s water supply. This took time and money to resolve. Eventually a septic system that “could probably handle Riverfront Stadium” was bio-engineered and finally approved. Construction began in 2005, and the club opened in 2006.

To be continued next month.

Thanks to Mike Collette for assistance with this article.