



The St. Louis Park Rec Center entrance

## ST. LOUIS PARK REC CENTER

# Staying Ahead of the Curve — from Refrigeration to Recreation

by *Shelby Brooks*

**W**HEN ST. LOUIS Park and Rec Center in Minnesota opened its doors in 1971, the approximately 40,000 square-foot facility showcased three pools and a single sheet of ice.

Today, the impressive community “playground,” owned and operated by the City of St. Louis Park, spans 100,000-square-feet and includes two NHL-size rinks and an outdoor aquatics park with all the “bells and whistles.” And that’s not all. Plans are underway for the construction of an outdoor ice rink in addition to major renovations to the existing indoor rinks.

“The Rec Center will be undergoing major renovations beginning in March,” says St. Louis Park Rec Center Manager Jason Eisold. “Both rink refrigeration systems and rink floors will be replaced with a single ammonia refrigeration plant.

This project will eliminate the current dependency on R-22, well ahead of the 2020 EPA ban on the manufacture and importation of R-22.” (See “EPA Ban on R-22,” Page 15)

The city will apply a \$400,000 grant from the Mighty Ducks Ice Arena Grant Program to fund part of the \$4.8-million renovation project. Commercial Refrigeration Systems will install the new ice-making systems for a cost of \$2.6 million. Other improvements include LED lighting, low emissivity ceiling and new dasher boards on both rinks; new dehumidification on the west rink and an RO water treatment system and melting pit and bleacher repairs on the east rink.

Design plans for the covered, outdoor ice rink, which will operate from November through March, are being finalized. In spring, the rink will be

converted to an athletic venue with artificial turf. During summer, it will be used for ‘dry floor’ events requiring a large open-air facility, such as weddings, flea markets and other special events.

**Due to their central location within the Twin Cities, the St. Louis Park Rec Center draws skaters from surrounding communities.**





## One Size Fits All??

When it comes to outfitting skaters, is it one size fits all?? Of course not! The wrong fit will make even the easiest moves difficult. In fact, it could be dangerous.

So it is with rink management and insurance. Are you covered sufficiently? At the best price and service level? Does your insurance plan fit your business model? If not, you could be headed for a fall.

Our **ICE** (Ice Center Evaluation) Program is designed specifically with the rink owner in mind. Call us to get a free evaluation and benefit from our 100+ years of combined insurance experience.

Let us help you get the right insurance fit. Then you can focus on your business.



**American Insurance**  
**The Right Fit**  
**617-770-9000**



Rink Insurance Program underwritten by an A+ Insurance Company



## St. Louis Park Rec Center

Skating Director Amber Karcher-Ramos, on ISI's weSKATE program:

*"It serves as a great feeder program to our freestyle and specialty classes. We see skating, whether it be for recreation or competitive, as a lifelong sport and work hard to instill the passion for skating in all of our students."*

### Ice Arena Staff

The Rec Center's ice arena staff includes a manager, skating director, 14 skating instructors, three skating assistants, two administrative assistants and 11 maintenance workers. Many attend the annual ISI District 10 seminar as well as other local trainings, and the skating instructors participate in the ISI Judge Certification Program.

"We have participated in the ISI Judge Certification Program for several years now and I can see the positive impact it has on our skating program," says skating director Amber Karcher-Ramos. "Our staff is skilled, knowledgeable, and eager to learn more to improve their expertise... We share ideas, successes and challenges and ask one another for advice or feedback regularly.

"Our veteran staff act as mentors to the new staff. Any time there is a challenge or obstacle, we work as a team to overcome it. Our main focus is the well-being of our skaters and we work diligently to ensure they meet their goals. Our amazing coaching team is one of the biggest components of the skating program's growing success."

### ISI Programming

The Rec Center uses ISI's weSKATE learn-to-skate program (Tots through Delta), Figure Skating (Freestyle, Figures, Adult, Open Freestyle), and Hockey. "It serves as a great feeder program to our freestyle and specialty classes," says Karcher-Ramos.

"We see skating, whether it be for recreation or competitive, as a lifelong sport and work to instill the passion for skating in all of our students. Our adult skating classes have been growing steadily and we have some adult skaters that are now interested in beginning to test and compete."

In addition to learn-to-skate classes, The Rec Center offers three hockey programs: hockey tots (age 4 to 6), hockey skills (age 7 to 14) and adult hockey skills (age 15 and up). The adult hockey skills class is a pilot program. Several adult hockey league players started showing up for adult classes, and as it turned out, some of the skating instructors on staff had experience in power and skating skills clinics with youth hockey teams. Seeing an opportunity to meet the skaters' unique needs and grow the program, they added the adult hockey skills class.

Due to their central location within the Twin Cities, The Rec Center draws skaters from surrounding communities. User groups include St. Louis Park High School hockey teams, the Benilde-St. Margaret's hockey teams, the St. Louis Park Hockey Association (325 participants) and the St. Louis Park Learn-to-Skate Program.

### Public Skating

Open skating is offered on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the day and on Saturday mornings and Sunday afternoons. During the busiest season of the year, there are as many as 100 skaters per session on the ice. These public sessions are monitored by skate guards

who double as skating assistants for The Rec Center's learn-to-skate program. They create interest in the program by talking to open skate participants about the program's rewards.

Several instructors give private lessons during open skate, which also encourages participation in the program. Karcher-Ramos found that scheduling the weekend open skating sessions right before or after the learn-to-skate program has its benefits – an increase in attendance at open skate and an easy way for learn-to-skate participants to get extra ice time.

Recently, the learn-to-skate program was adjusted to include Sunday evenings so as to accommodate the city's large Jewish population and other members of the community for whom Saturdays are not available for recreational activities. "This adjustment has been extremely successful and Sunday evening classes are a big hit!" says Eisold.

### ISI Competitions

The Rec Center has become more involved in ISI competitions. "We recently just dipped our toes into family spotlight, rhythmic, ensemble and interpretive," says Karcher-Ramos. "ISI events provide so many options to have fun in a team atmosphere. They have brought our competitive skaters, their families and coaches closer. We are all so supportive of one another and extremely proud to represent our rink and our growing skate school. The annual spring ice show starts to peak interest for a lot of our skaters to

**The facility offers open skating five days a week, where skate guards create interest in the ISI weSKATE learn-to-skate program. Instructors also give private lessons during open skating, which also encourages participation in weSKATE.**



try competitions or it inspires them to keep moving forward in lessons. Our little ones really look up to our older freestyle skaters and coaches—striving to be just like them.”

A variety of special skating events, such as Turkeys on Ice, Goblins on Ice, Disco Skating, Spring Ice Show, Summer Skating Camp, and Skate School Open Houses, are held throughout the year and skating promos are staged from December through February at nearby seasonal rinks.

To spread the word about their programs, The Rec Center makes use of their quarterly parks and recreation brochure, the city’s website and cable TV stations, the *St. Louis Park Magazine* and through a partnership with the local school district. They also use social media, including Facebook and Twitter.

“We are always evaluating our programs and strive to better serve our skaters and families,” says Karcher-Ramos. “St. Louis Park is a great place to live and work — we are beyond grateful to be a part of such a supportive and collaborative community. It is our goal to represent our community in the local skating world to the best of our ability.”

## EPA Ban on R-22

**For more than four decades, many ice arenas have been using R-22 refrigerant in their ice making systems. However, as part of a global initiative to prevent greenhouse gases from contributing to the depletion of the ozone layer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) plans to terminate the production of R-22 entirely by 2020.**

**After that deadline, ice arenas will be able to use the odorless gas for existing refrigeration systems, but they will be dependent on recycled and leftover reserves of R-22, which could become costly.**

**Rink owners are faced with a gripping dilemma. Should they (or can they afford to) shell out over a million dollars for a new system? While some ice rink owners hope to stay with the system they’ve been using by doing preventative maintenance and catching leaks before they become a problem, others, including St. Louis Park Rec Center, are taking action to transition to environmentally friendly systems that use other refrigerants.**

*For further information, visit [epa.gov](http://epa.gov)*



**Maximum Solutions Inc.**

**Cloud-Based Solution**

*No Hardware.  
No Maintenance.  
No Hassle.*

**The Leader in Arena Management Software**

- Facility Scheduling
- Activity Registration
- League Scheduling
- Equipment Rental
- Membership Management
- Point of Sale
- Locker Rental
- Website Integration
- Digital Signage
- Employee Time Clock
- Credit Card Processing
- Day Camp
- Scholarship Management
- Multi-Use Pass

855-686-3493      [www.maxsolutions.com](http://www.maxsolutions.com)      [sales@maxsolutions.com](mailto:sales@maxsolutions.com)