

## Building Community

There are two teams of volunteers who venture out in the freezing cold for hours on end, to make our community a better place.

Meet Manotick's Outdoor Rink Teams – at McLean and Centennial Parks.

For McLean Park (led by Jason Purcell) – L to R – Brian Little, Finley Little, Brad Markham, Jason Purcell, Ian Olthof and 'Bo' the dog. Also on the team, but not in the photo - Gord MacGregor, Corey Moreau, Sean Reid, and Matt Moore.



For Centennial Park – led by Tom Hollinger with regular volunteers Curtis Fillier, Mark Brown, Steve West, Evan Hilborn, Graeme Hollinger, Pat Hilborn. There are numerous others that help as required and when available.

Manotick Culture, Parks and Recreation Association (MCPRA) operates both outdoor rinks (ODRs) with funding from the City of Ottawa. Both sites maintain a 'board rink' and a puddle rink.



The program is coordinated by longtime community volunteer, Mike O'Neil (yes, of Mike O'Neil Arena fame). But it's the on-the-ground efforts that make the system work. Jason Purcell has led the McLean rink for the past 4 years and has a good core group that share the load, with 2 or 3 people working each night around 10 p.m. to shovel, flood and clean up. Similarly, Tom Hollinger has led the Centennial team for the last 4 years. The two teams share equipment and trade secrets, and are looking forward to a first-time rival hockey spar ... prefacing a late night flood, maybe followed by pizza and a pop!

What's the secret to a great outdoor rink? The cooperation of Mother Nature and committed volunteers! The initial prep takes about 10 days, going out two or three times a day. If you don't have a tarp to hold water, then you also need a good snow pack as a base. You should always apply a light / medium layer of water; if you put down too much water, you end up with air pockets and shale ice. The entire process is driven by weather, -10°C or colder, is ideal.



Another factor that makes a big difference is the size of the hose. Forget the garden hose, you need a fire hose. Both Tom and Jason are also advocates of the 'bunker' – these are the cement block buildings, located close to the rinks. They keep the hose from freezing and provide nearby storage for shovels and equipment. A shout out also to Adam McCosham, Manotick Home Hardware, who has always been there to support the ODR efforts.

Both volunteers have experienced the trials of the effort. Jason watched while someone drove their truck onto the puddle rink, spinning in circles. There was a little chat with the offender and it has never happened again. Tom had the boards disappear one fall – now that’s a problem! Another challenge is the eager skater(s) going on the ice before it’s ready. Patience at the beginning of the season leads to better ice sooner.

But why do these committed volunteers return each night, in sub-zero temperatures? Jason is a fitness enthusiast and huge advocate for getting kids outdoors, developing their skills, socializing and growing a sense of community. “When I see those kids from St. Leonard’s School walk to the park with their skates slung over their shoulder, it just makes everything worthwhile.”

Tom had a similar response. “It’s seeing the 15 year-old pass the puck to the 6 year-old and letting him score. It’s that unstructured, spontaneous activity, away from the computer screen. Seeing the ODR become a community meeting place has been greatly satisfying.”

Both Tom and Jason have observed some changes during these last two winters of the pandemic. Not only are there more people using the outdoor rinks, but people are more charitable - taking care with the site, stopping to pick up the garbage, helping with the shoveling, and simply saying ‘thanks’ to the volunteers. It means a lot.

So, if you’re wondering what to do at 9:30 p.m. (Centennial) or 10:00 p.m. (McLean Park), drop by and say ‘thanks’ ...maybe bring a thermos of hot chocolate!

