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Speedskating oval to open

Ice track in Cuddy Park is for families, other skaters too

By MIKE CAMPBELL
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Published: November 13th, 2008 12:04 AM
Last Modified: November 13th, 2008 11:46 AM

After years of anticipation, skaters should be gliding around the new Olympic-size speedskating oval at the 15-acre Cuddy Family Midtown Park next week.



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ERIK HILL / Anchorage Daily News
Derek Pitka of Alpine Services sprays a thin skin of water onto the new speedskating oval at Cuddy Family Midtown Park, next to the Loussac Library Nov. 11, 2008.

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The 400-meter oval is part of \$4.4 million in Cuddy Park projects that include a pond, a large lawn and a garden with a public plaza and benches. The oval will officially open at 5:15 p.m. Tuesday -- just before the Alaska Speedskating Club takes the ice for a practice session -- with a ceremony that includes hot cocoa.

Workers with the contractor Alpine Services have been adding layer upon thin layer of water to the oval and erecting curbs of ice since late October and expect to be finished

soon. Some portions of the oval have as little as a quarter-inch of ice now, with 1 1/2 inches throughout considered ideal.

"You can only lay a little (ice) at a time," said Edwin Blair, owner of Alpine Services. "It takes about 10 floodings."

Blair estimated that this winter was running two to three weeks ahead of normal, helping his operation. The National Weather Service said Anchorage temperatures remained consistently below freezing from Oct. 21 until earlier this week.

"It's going pretty well," said Blair, who added that the size of the oval makes it his biggest ice-making job in town. "Obviously, it's best when it's cold enough the water starts freezing instantly. We're all geniuses at 5 below. You can make ice on a bowling ball."

The fairly level surface of the new oval -- spared so far from frost heaves -- helps, Blair said. Until Tuesday's snowfall, Alpine Service had been forced to collect Zamboni-made slush from the Sullivan Arena to build curbs that surround the oval.

The opening will culminate a decades-old dream especially dear to local speedskaters. About four years ago, the city hired local landscape architects and Project for Public Spaces of New York to come up with a plan to

enliven the overlooked midtown park next to the Loussac Library and draw more people to it.

Consultants said the city needed a place that could accommodate many activities, from reading on

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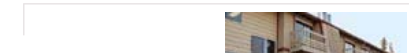
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a bench to ice skating. A local committee laid out the details, and a plan was adopted.

"I think we'll see a definite surge in use," said city parks superintendent Monique Anderson.

Local speedskaters hope so.

"We look at this as a huge opportunity," said Amy Fitzpatrick, president of the Alaska Speedskating Club.

"It's hard to believe it's actually happening," added Peter Haeussler, the club's head coach who took a trial run on the oval over the weekend. "I managed to find the one square foot with no ice on it and took a tumble."

Fitzpatrick said that Anchorage joins just five other U.S. communities -- Salt Lake City, Milwaukee, Lake Placid, N.Y., Roseville, Minn., and Butte, Mont. -- with long-track, outdoor speedskating ovals. Some are refrigerated, others covered.

Although the Alaska Speedskating Club only has about two dozen members, Fitzpatrick hopes the new outdoor oval will boost interest in the sport. Starting next week, the club will practice on the oval from 5:30-7 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays and 1-3 p.m. Sundays, with the public invited to participate and club members on hand to help newcomers.

Land Design North landscape architect Dwayne Adams, the designer behind the Cuddy Family Midtown Park master plan, said the speedskating oval won't ever be roofed.

"It's all to competitive standard size, although its direction is not specifically targeted to competition," Adams said. "It's really geared more to family and skaters and people who want to use it at noontime."

Skaters will also be able to use a man-made lake in the park that Blair said will also be cleared of snow and maintained once its ice is thick enough.

Contact reporter Mike Campbell at mcampbell@adn.com or 257-4329.

Race schedule at Cuddy Midtown Oval

- DEC. 28 -- Inaugural Races
- JAN. 4 -- Long John Races (race in long underwear)
- JAN. 10 -- Duathlon pairing skiers and skaters
- JAN. 25 -- Fun Race Day with speedskating and citizen races
- FEB. 15 -- State Long Track Championships
- FEB. 22 -- Markis Marathon with 5-K, 10-K, 25-K and 50-K races

Alaska Speedskating Club

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lol... don't even get me started about Kincaid. Too many parents with soccer brats sitting up way to high on that decision. Set all the cost and destruction of Kincaid aside and think about parking. Where the heck are they going to have everyone park when there is a game at every field? Maybe if it was just soccer going on, but what about ALL THE OTHER USES for that place. They other parking lot might be enough, but I'm waiting to see. What about private parties that pay for use of the chalet? Better check the soccer schedule if you don't want to have your entire wedding party walking down the road before you can go down the isle. So are we just supposed to go "oh, they are playing soccer, better go somewhere else" and give them the entire use of Kincaid park so they can occupy a bunch of grass rectangles. Yea, there couldn't have been any other flat or unmaintained fields anywhere else in Anchorage to develop, right?

[Recommend \(0\)](#)**Mow10Man** wrote on 11/15/2008 06:18:48 PM:

trout-
yea its good on your knees... until you take a spill at 20mph on glare ice and go sliding off the track.

[Recommend \(0\)](#)**nanuq** wrote on 11/14/2008 11:01:15 AM:

I wonder if the speedskaters' club will do all the maintenance this winter? Shoveling and hotmopping keeps the surface nice, and between all the club members, it's a light burden to keep the surface pristine. Plus shoveling is great exercise on skates!

[Recommend \(0\)](#)**rat** wrote on 11/14/2008 06:48:25 AM:

Even the Alaska Speedskating Club couldn't believe this is happening. Neither can I. How much money was spent for how few people. This is unbelievable. What a burden.

[Recommend \(1\)](#)**janetmluce** wrote on 11/13/2008 10:22:01 PM:

I think it is great to have a place where people can practice another sport. Make use of it! I am too far away to benefit.

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