

Adrian launching skating club

FOR AN AREA that never had an ice rink until 2007, Adrian is all of a sudden centered around figure skating. Spurred by Adrian College building the Arrington Ice Arena for its hockey and synchro team, figure skating is new to the area, but plans are in place to start a club soon.

However, successfully creating a club from scratch hinges upon how well the sport is sold to the one ice sheet town in southern Lenawee County.

The future looks bright. Last year about 70 skaters signed up for the fall Learn to Skate program and this year the group hopes to get upwards of 100 kids learning to skate through the winter months.

The home of just the second varsity synchro team in the nation, Adrian College provides a unique opportunity for young skaters who stick with the sport.

"We want to keep them skating here and let them know that if they keep skating, they might be able to get a college scholarship down the line," said Todd Mittelmeier, 25, the ice arena's director. "Parents like to hear that, which is nice because we want to use the Learn to Skate program to really drive the club in the future." If progress continues at this pace, the club may be sanctioned within a year depending on if the group can meet U.S. Figure Skating requirements – most notably having at least a 25-member roster, 10 of whom need to be adult members over the age of 18.

Besides the college rub, the prospective club has other things going for it – like geography. The nearest rinks are located in Ann Arbor and Jackson – both over 45 minutes away – and Adrian has the only ice arena in the county. In addition to that, because the 41,000-square-foot arena is college-run, ice time costs are relatively affordable, allowing just about everyone the opportunity to skate.

"Right now, we can't compete with programs like they have in Ann Arbor and take their skaters away, but we can get a grassroots program going," said Mittelmeier, of Adrian. "We want to get kids into skating at an early age and as they grow with the club, we will become more competitive."

Most of the kids learning to skate are 4- to 8-year-olds, with a few aged 11 and 12. By the end of the upcoming fall session, a core group of skaters for the club should

by **KEVIN KOLOIAN**

start to take shape.

Lindsay Patterson, the head coach of the Adrian College synchro team and coordinator of the Learn to Skate program, is hopeful that it is just a matter of time before the club is officially formed.

"Once we start having more kids move up in badges and get to freestyle, we should have an idea of how big we can be," said Patterson, 25, of Adrian.

But Adrian is not your typical skating community. There are not many sports in the area that take a year-round commitment like skating, so it will take some getting used to. Kids play mainstream sports, like basketball and baseball. When one season is over they move on to the next sport.

"We were looking to find something for the kids to do during the wintertime and an activity that they could do on Saturday and Sunday morning here in Lenawee County. With skating, they can practice all throughout the year," said Ron Fogarty, 36, of Adrian, whose daughters, Rachel, 10, and Emma, 7, have been part of Learn to Skate since it started.

Fogarty, who coaches Adrian College's hockey team, added that it's nice to have a new sport that all of the kids in the community can do together.

The kids really love the school's sports teams. They are jumping — and spinning — at the chance to interact with the skaters and hockey players who volunteer and get work-study credit for coaching Learn to Skate.

"It's really cool working with the skaters on the synchro team. When I get older I hope I can skate just like them," said Rachel Fogarty, who is starting the fifth grade this fall at Madison Elementary School in Adrian.

The first year was more about educating the community on the sport. Now, the group is ready to take a crack at forming a



BLADE PHOTO / ASHLEY LEE

Rachel, left, and Emma Fogarty said they met a lot of new friends learning how to skate in Adrian.

10 QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

- ① A prospective club must be skating as an organized group for six consecutive months prior to the date of application.
- ② The club should be able to secure exclusive ice time, on a regular basis, either at a rink or some other place where ice is available.
- ③ It must split up ice time on a regular basis for one or more of the following programs: figures, free skating, ice dancing, synchronized skating or other figure skating disciplines.
- ④ The club needs to have at least 25 home club members, 10 of whom are adults over the age of 18.
- ⑤ A payment of \$50 must be included with the application.
- ⑥ Upon approval, a prospective club may be granted provisional membership by the Membership Committee.
- ⑦ For the application to be considered for full club membership at the next meeting of the Governing Council, it must be postmarked no later than Dec. 31.
- ⑧ A provisional club can sanction exhibitions and carnivals, hold test sessions and its members can compete under the club banner. Two things cannot be done until granted full membership: host a qualifying competition and vote at the Governing Council.
- ⑨ Until the club has become official, members who want to compete or test must join U.S. Figure Skating through another member club or as an individual member.
- ⑩ During provisional status and/or the six-month "formation" period, the prospective club must complete club education requirements as specified by the Membership Committee.

serious club. But, first, the parents must be onboard.

An idea floating around is to start a Learn to Skate for parents and maybe even form an adult synchro team. That way, they can see firsthand how much dedication the sport requires.

"We need the parents to understand that this is how the progression line goes. We need to let them know that this not something that their kid can come out for just once a week if they want them to become a world-class skater," Mittelmeier said.

Kevin Koloian is a Blade staff writer.