

New Ice Rink Might Run 24 Hours a Day

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The developer of Omaha's new ice arena at Tranquility Park says demand for ice time from hockey leagues and skating clubs might turn the arena into a 24-hour daily operation.

Tim Moylan, owner and president of South Pacific Tranquility Corp., said the arena building — at 122nd Street and West Maple Road — will include two ice rinks, video arcades, party rooms and food services.

The indoor arena's standard hockey rink, 200 feet long and 85 feet wide, opened Saturday.

The facility also will have an Olympic rink, the first in Omaha. It is expected to be ready by Dec. 1. An Olympic rink is 200 feet long and 100

feet wide.

In an unusual agreement, the 74,000-square-foot arena was built on public land under a contract with the City of Omaha. Moylan said the arena was nearly fully rented for organized hockey and figure skating. The facility also will have open skating for the public.

"Our expectation is that during the winter season, it will be a 24-hour operation," Moylan said. "During the summer, we'll just have to wait and see if there is that kind of demand."

Larry Foster, administrator of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, said ice hockey and skating are growing in popularity.

He said that with the opening of Tranquility, existing rinks at city-owned Benson Park, 7002 Military Ave., and Hitchcock Park, 5005 S. 45th

St., have seen only minimal drops in rental times.

"It's kind of amazing that two new surfaces could come on the scene and not have a significant impact on the existing facilities," Foster said.

The arena is in the southwest corner of Tranquility Park, a 340-acre parcel purchased by the city in the 1960s.

Foster said the Tranquility arena will relieve scheduling pressures at Benson and Hitchcock. Because of demand for ice time, adult and youth hockey teams playing at those rinks have had games routinely scheduled early in the morning or late at night.

Hockey programs "were even turning kids away because there simply wasn't enough ice time," Foster said.

Mark Hasebrook, director of an adult hockey league in Omaha, said

that when "faced with playing at midnight, a lot of people have just said, 'Well, I won't do it.' This (Tranquility) will allow a lot of people who haven't been initiated to the game of ice hockey, in particular, a chance to play."

Parks officials have said that building an ice arena was a low priority for city government because of limited money and higher priorities. By enlisting a private developer for the project, the city will be able to use bond dollars for other projects such as the renovation of existing parks.

Under the contract with the city, South Pacific is financing the arena at a cost of about \$3 million.

The company also has the option of developing a \$2 million aquatic center

Please turn to Page 2, Col. 1



TWIN RINKS: The \$3 million ice arena at Tranquility Park contains two rinks and will have a concessions area, seating, party rooms and other amenities. The facility is 74,000 square feet. It is in the southwest corner of the 340-acre city park.

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Continued from Page 1

at the park. Moylan said South Pacific has started preliminary design work on that center, which would include a pool, water slides and sand.

He said he was not certain of developing the aquatic center.

"We still have to see if everything makes (financial) sense on it," Moylan said.

City Councilman Lee Terry said the aquatic center has a tentative opening date for the summer of 1997. If it is not operating by then, the city has the right to seek another developer.

Terry said that with an ice facility, possible aquatic center, existing soccer and softball fields and a tennis complex now under construction, Tranquility has the potential to be the premier municipal park in the region.

Hasebrook, one of about 400 adult hockey players in Omaha, is director of the Hockey North America league.

"Our league has been hampered by not being able to get reasonable ice times," he said.

Hasebrook has laced up his skates as late as midnight for some games at Benson or Hitchcock. On Sunday, he played in the afternoon at Tranquility.

He described the arena as a clean, well-lit place with a glistening, smooth ice surface.

The arena is the city's first ice facility west of 72nd Street. Hasebrook said the location has the practical benefit of convenience.

"If you look at the youth hockey — all the kids who play and where they live — the vast majority are from west of 72nd Street," Hasebrook said.

Terry said that while the arena may be convenient for them, the facility will be used by people from all over the city.

South Pacific will not pay property taxes on the building because the city retains ownership of the land.

As arena manager, South Pacific will pay the city a percentage of gross receipts. The payout will range from 2.15 percent for gross receipts between \$400,000 and \$1 million to 5.25 percent for gross receipts exceeding \$1.5 million.

The city in turn agreed to build a 250-stall parking lot and access road and, under the contract terms, could assume ownership of the building after 25 years. The road is nearly completed.

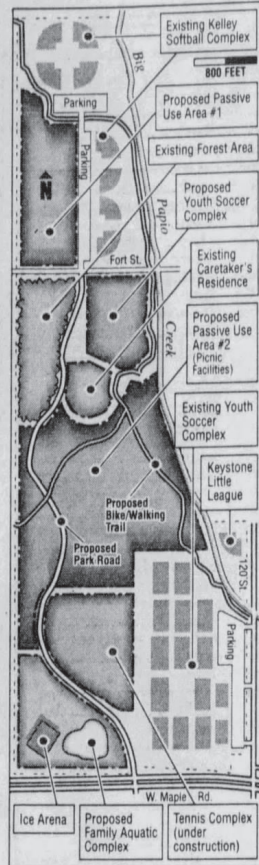
Foster said the road, parking lot and storm sewer will cost about \$340,000.

The improvements will be paid through parks and recreation bonds and state funds.

Under the contract, the city has the right to review the arena's admissions charges and other fees.

The Tranquility arena opened about six weeks later than planned. Moylan said the construction start was delayed by heavy rains last spring. He said features such as spectator seating, party rooms and the concessions area will be completed by the end of this month.

Times for public skating had not been set. Moylan said public skating will be offered on weekdays after school and on Saturdays and Sundays. The admission charge will be \$5, which includes skate rental.



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