

New ice center will help youth programs grow

By Dave Dreeszen

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With the opening of the Siouxland Ice Center, youth hockey players no longer will be turned away.

Nor will they be forced to practice at midnight.

The \$2.5 million ice center, which officially opens Thursday, greatly increases ice time for young hockey players and figure skaters.

Youth skating enthusiasts spearheaded the fund-raising campaign for the arena, located just south of Lewis and Clark Park.

Previously, the metro area's only indoor rink was in Municipal Auditorium. Because of limited ice time there, it had become virtually impossible for the youth hockey program to grow, SYA President Kirk Lukehart said.

In the last three years, the number of participants had fallen from around 370 to 300, he said. During that time, the organization did not accept new players ages 10 or older.

"For all practical purposes, we put a hold on our recruiting because of the lack of ice time," Lukehart said. "That's first and foremost why we needed a second rink."

With both the auditorium and ice center available, SYA officials anticipate the number of participants to grow to 500 within two to three years, he said.

This winter, total youth hockey ice hours will grow by 40 percent, from around 1,000 to 1,400 hours, Lukehart said. Nearly all practices and games will occur between 4:15 p.m. and 10 p.m., he said.

Lukehart said the crowded auditorium schedule had forced youth teams to practice as early as 6 a.m. and as late as midnight.

With a second rink, there also

Grand opening

A grand opening for the new Siouxland Ice Center is scheduled for Thursday.

The public is invited to tour the \$2.5 million facility from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

There will be free public skating from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. The regular \$2 skate rental fee will be charged.

The ice center is located just south of Lewis and Clark Park.

will be added ice time for the Silver Blades youth figure skating program, which in recent years has seen dramatic growth.

The number of public skating hours will triple, from 4 to 12 hours per week, said Dennis Gann, executive director of the Convention Center/Auditorium/Tourism Bureau.

With the added hours, skaters should have more elbow room. The auditorium rink typically was crowded, Gann said.

The ice center will host public skating on Fridays from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m., Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and Sundays from 6 p.m. 8 p.m.

The auditorium will continue to have public skating with hours from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays, 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Tuesdays and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Wednesdays.

The ice center, which features a regulation NHL rink, has permanent seating for 537. The orange seats came from the auditorium, as did the scoreboards, said Todd Lien, the ice center manager.

The Sioux City Musketeers will occasionally practice at the ice center, but will continue to play home games at the larger-capacity auditorium. The new center will become the home arena for the Sioux City Metros high school team.

The ice center also will host other youth league games and

some tournaments. Sioux City, for instance, recently landed a regional youth tournament sponsored by the USA Central Hockey District, Lukehart said. Fifteen state championship teams from Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Wisconsin have been invited to compete in the tournament next spring.

Gann said such tournaments will bring in tourist dollars and help cover costs of running the ice center. CCAT, which will operate the ice center, expects the facility to break even. Revenue from ice time rentals, public skating fees and concessions are expected to cover the estimated annual expenses of \$342,000, he said.

While the city will run the ice center, it was built with a combination of public and private funds.

The city contributed \$600,000, with the rest coming from donations by individuals, businesses and other sources.

Lukehart said the campaign came in about \$350,000 short of its goal. Since then, however, an additional \$100,000 has been raised. On Tuesday, IBP inc. agreed to contribute \$150,000 if the campaign raises another \$100,000, he said.

The \$150,000 matching gift would bring IBP's total donation to the project to \$250,000, said Lukehart, an executive at the Dakota City-based company.