

# On frozen pond: Bentonville skates through the holidays with tempora

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Northwest Arkansas Times

Bentonville residents and visitors have a place to practice their double axels and reverse camel spins — or, more likely, lace up a pair of skates for the first time. The city's first outdoor ice skating rink has taken up temporary residence in the Harps parking lot downtown.

"We wanted to try something new for Christmas this year," said Katie Bolton, advertising and promotions coordinator for Bentonville's Advertising and Promotions Commission.

## WINTER

### WONDERLAND ICE RINK

**Where:** Harps parking lot, corner of Northwest Second and Main streets, Bentonville

**When:** through Dec. 24

**Hours:** noon to 8 p.m.

Mondays through

Thursdays; noon to 9 p.m.

Fridays through Sundays;

will close at 6 p.m. Dec. 24

**Admission:** free

When the idea for a rink came up at a meeting, Bolton thought it sounded crazy — until she found a Web site for Ice Rink Events, a Texas company that constructs rinks across the country for everything from public skating in parks and shopping malls to professional hockey and figure skating competitions.

At a cost of \$45,000, Bentonville's 65-by-32-foot rink is one of the smallest available. The largest measure up to 200 by 85. Construction began Nov. 27.

The rink, which opened Dec. 5, has a maximum capacity of 80 people at one time and has attracted about

1,500 skaters so far, from toddlers to 70-somethings. Dec. 6 alone saw about 700.

If the community response stays strong, the rink could make a reappearance next year, Bolton said.

To help with day-to-day upkeep and operation, the commission hired about 30 locals. Three "ice elves" are stationed around the skating area to make sure things run smoothly. The folks who hand out the ice skates have been dubbed "Rudolphs," and "Santa's helpers" are responsible for making sure liability forms are signed. Then there are the "human Zambonis," who, like their large riding lawn mower-like counterparts, keep the ice surface smooth by clearing away chips caused by skate blades.

According to IceRinkEvents.com, any surface — usually a parking lot, tennis court, gymnasium — can serve as a rink's base.

The first step is to level the site with either compacted sand or a wooden platform. An insulation barrier and liner are next, followed by a piping mat rolled out like carpeting. The pipes are then connected to a refrigeration system and filled with coolant solution.

As the tubing freezes, it begins to frost. Water is sprayed on the rink, first as a mist and then a more substantial flow as it continues to freeze. The tubing, made of a noncorrosive polymer developed as part of NASA's Apollo program, is completely covered within hours.

The Bentonville rink's ice is about 2 to 3 inches thick, and it is flooded daily to keep the surface fresh, Bolton said. A tent shelters the ice from snow and rain, which can cause it to melt.

The rink is available for parties and can be rented at the rate of \$400 for two hours. Vendors serving hot



BROOKE MANN

Andy True, 6, of Bentonville, center, ice skates for the first time Monday at the Harps parking lot near the Bentonville square. The rink will operate through D

dogs, cocoa, coffee and cider are located nearby on the square. Canned food drives take place on Friday and Sat-

urday nights to benefit Helping Hands.

Skating lessons will be offered at the rink from 11-

11:30 a.m. day, Dec. 11. Cost is \$5 per skater, call