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Bryant Park Forecast: Ice in October

Olympic-Size Rink Will Charge No Admission

By **TIMOTHY WILLIAMS**

The Bryant Park lawn, well known for its pristine grass and the near-perfect bodies that lounge upon it in summer, will soon also be known for the blades gliding across it in winter.

The Pond at Bryant Park, scheduled to open on Oct. 28, will be a portable, Olympic-size rink large enough for 500 skaters to pirouette upon (or slip and fall) among the high-rises of Midtown Manhattan.

A rarity among the handful of ice rinks in Manhattan, it will have no admission charge, and organizers hope it will attract crowds during the winter when the park is nearly empty.

"It's freezing out there from Nov. 1 to March 31 and sometimes later — and so for five months we do nothing," said Daniel A. Biederman, executive director of the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation. "So we said, 'Let's make Bryant Park usable in the winter.'"

Despite the presence of skating rinks nearby at Rockefeller Center and in Central Park, Mr. Biederman is counting on the population of about 80,000 office workers in the 10-block

area around Bryant Park, combined with tourists and visitors to the New York Public Library next door, to fill the rink. On many winter days, particularly weekends, there are long waits at both Wollman Rink in Central Park and the rink at Rockefeller Center.

"People are jumping all over themselves to have more ice in Manhattan," said Ethan Lercher, Bryant Park's director of events. The rink will end its season on Jan. 15, when it will close to make way for the annual spring fashion shows held in the park.

In interviews, the rink's organizers take pains to say that their pond will in no way compete with its neighbors, which have been New York institutions for years.

Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe agreed. "Wollman Rink in Central Park is often very crowded at peak hours," Mr. Benepe said in an e-mail message. "We don't believe at this point visitation there will be diminished, and in any event, the public good of another skating venue, especially without

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Forecast for Bryant Park: Ice in October, and a Big Rink With No Admission Price

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this point visitation there will be diminished, and in any event, the public good of another skating venue, especially without large capital and expense costs to the city, outweighs any potential marginal loss of income."

The Parks Department operates Wollman Rink with the Trump Organization.

"We are also anxious to see how well the temporary rink technology works," Mr. Benepe said in the e-mail message, "to see if we can try this out in other areas of the city where local elected officials have suggested installing rinks."

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every Sunday**

A Rockefeller Center spokeswoman said the center was happy to see more ice. "We think a rink at Bryant Park will be a great addition to what New York City has to offer as a winter wonderland," said the spokeswoman, Suzanne Halpin. "Welcome!"

The Bryant Park rink, which will take two weeks to put in place and cost \$4 million, will measure 17,000 square feet — about half the size of Wollman and about twice the size of the Rockefeller Center rink. The temporary rink will be put directly onto Bryant Park's sod, necessitating that the lawn's crown — built to keep rain and snow melt from pooling — be flattened first. The rink's three-inch surface of ice will be laid atop layers of plastic and foam.

Mr. Biederman originally considered placing a more permanent rink in the park, but engineers concluded that a portable facility would have to

do, given that the public library's underground annex sits directly below the park in a climate-controlled setting to help preserve its books.

Library officials had originally not been keen on the idea of an ice rink in their backyard, but the library now says it has no objection.

"We have closely reviewed the plans for the Bryant Park ice rink to make sure its installation is safe for the library's collections and building," Herb Scher, the library's spokesman, said in a statement. "The concerns we've raised are being addressed, and we know that Bryant Park, with its views of the library's Beaux-Arts facade, will provide a beautiful setting for skating this winter."

One consideration was the weight of the rink, but engineers determined that a portable rink, even with a 6,000-pound Zamboni ice-cleaning machine and a rink full of skaters,

Up to 500 can skate amid the high-rises of Midtown Manhattan.

would still weigh less than a typical crowd at the fall and spring fashion shows at which the park is host each year.

While Wollman, Rockefeller Center and Manhattan's other ice skating rinks charge admission fees, the Bryant Park rink will be free, as long as you bring your own skates. (Skate rentals there will be \$7.50 a day.)

By comparison, when the rink at Rockefeller Center opens on Saturday, adults will be charged a \$13 fee on Fridays through Sundays and holidays, plus a \$7 charge for renting

skates for an hour and a half of skating. After Dec. 17, the admission fee will rise to \$17 for adults plus \$8 for skate rentals.

At Wollman, which opens on Oct. 15, the charge will be \$11 for adult weekend skating and \$3.75 to rent skates.

Mr. Biederman first came up with the idea for a rink in Bryant Park in the mid-1990's, but it was dropped because the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, which operates the park, could not afford it. The proposal was revisited in 2001 but dropped again.

"We said, 'We'll figure it out someday'; we never give up on an idea," Mr. Biederman said.

This year, the organization paired with ID&A L.L.C., a New York company that operates Bryant Park's holiday market, which was able to negotiate a corporate sponsorship

deal with Citigroup. Texas-based IceRinkEvents.com will install and operate the rink.

"The business concept is this helps the market and the market helps this," Mr. Biederman said. "It all creates an ambience that this is the place to be, and the 'wow factor' it gives us means the park will be more operationally successful."

In Midtown, Kendra Andrews, 24, who goes ice skating two or three times each winter, said she would go more often if it were more affordable. "Where I'm from in Canada, you don't pay; you go to the pond with your skates and that's that," she said. "An outdoor place for free skating would be wonderful."

Her friend, Brian Drew, 27, said he had never tried ice skating but was willing to give it a shot, adding, "There's not much excuse anymore if it's free and it's right in the middle of Midtown Manhattan."