

LOCALNEWS

Making memories in Ranier

Skating party set for Sunday

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

An afternoon of skating, s'mores and partying with Minnie and Mickey Mouse is planned for Sunday at the rink in Ranier.

To celebrate additions of a new fire pit and a soon-to-be installed speaker system at the popular gathering spot in Ranier, a skating party is set for noon to 3 p.m. Sunday at the rink, located on Spruce Street. According to organizers, the event is free and open to anyone and everyone. The International Falls Figure Skating Club will also hold performances during the afternoon.

"One of the main objectives of the current Ranier City Council is to focus on community enhancements," Mayor Dennis Wagner said. "Our quality of life affects the performance of existing businesses and is an important factor in determining whether new businesses and individuals will visit and/or move to the area."

Funding for the rink's additions was a joint effort between the city of Ranier, the Ranier Recreation Club, Koochiching Community Development Association and many community members and local businesses that donated their time or resources to the project.

The mayor said community enhancements are working to create, improve and strengthen the quality

of life by promoting recreational, health, fitness and social activities in Ranier.

"It is the hope of the Ranier City Council that these projects will be catalysts for further enhancements of the Ranier community," he said. "The council has reserved funds for continued community enhancement projects in 2014."

Although the council has set funds aside, Wagner said the projects wouldn't come to fruition without volunteer efforts and those who come and enjoy the rink and sledding hill during the winter months.

"Ranier's rink is designed for the whole family to enjoy and create lasting memories for years to come," he said. "Once at the rink no matter if you choose to skate or just be an on looker, there are several ways to enjoy the rink this winter."

HISTORY OF THE
RANIER RINK

According to John Walls, president of the Ranier Recreation Club, the history of Ranier's rink dates back to 1955 when the idea to form a rink on land rather than on Rainy Lake was formed.

"The impetus for making the rink on land was because Butch and (his) brother Bud Lessard were plowing the river rink west of Duluth Street dock in 1954, and put the plow truck through the ice," Walls said. "The ladies and gents of the time were not too happy that all those years their kids were skating on thin ice."

Walls said resident Ed



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Children roast marshmallows donated by County Market at the newly-established fire pit near the skating rink and sledding hill in Ranier.

Woods Sr. spearheaded the effort to get the land-based rink going with the help of friends to clear an area for it. Later on, Woods purchased a skate sharpener and would sharpen skates for free.

"They used the old horse-drawn fire engine for flooding the rinks at first," he said, adding rink tenders had to use a well east of the rink by sinking an old gas tank with holes cut in it. "Later, they used pumps and a hose they had to go get from the community building garage every time they flooded (the rink)."

The sledding hill located near the rink used to be north of the present hill, and was a lot higher, Walls said, because so much fill was brought in later in the 1970s for the sewer collection system put in there. This lost about 10 feet of the hills' height, he said.

"The Rainy Lake Women's Club would bring down baked goods and hot chocolate for the kids once in a while," he continued. "Later the Ranier Rec Club

formed, and I think worked together with the women on all kinds of projects."

Eventually, the club established a concrete slab for the beginning of a warming shack. Walls said the club got the Army Reserve to help bury railroad ties in 1986 and several volunteers donated their "time and manpower" to add on to the building that stands there today.

Walls also mentioned these "old tidbits":

■ George Finstad used to put an outboard motor in a hole in the ice and run it to flood the ice north of Finstads Marine for the kids then.

■ The undefeated Bronco hockey team of 1961 / 1962 that won the state tournament, used to play boot hockey every Wednesday at the old rink.

■ Spike Woods was in sixth grade when the first new rink was put in, and he helped his dad flood it, then got two candy bars for doing so. He was so pumped to skate that first winter he couldn't stand it.

Raising awareness to fight fraud

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

For the sixth year in a row, Feb. 10-14 is Minnesota Insurance Fraud Awareness Week, which attempts to call attention to a problem costing Minnesotans millions of dollars per year. This event is sponsored by the Minnesota chapter of the International Association of Special Investigation Units.

Minnesota's fraud fighting community is emphasizing this year's awareness week because statistics show fraud is increasing in Minnesota. According to the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud, a Minnesota family pays more than \$1,400 a year in higher insurance premiums and other costs because of insurance fraud. Nationwide, more than \$80 billion a year is lost to insurance fraud.

According to the National Insurance Crime Bureau, among states with a serious fraud problem, Minnesota leads the nation in increased organized criminal activity surrounding no-fault auto insurance fraud. Sometimes this fraud is easier to spot, as criminals will attempt to stage fake accidents and make claims for injuries

that did not happen. Other times fraud is harder to detect, such as medical providers billing insurers and their policyholders for services not rendered.

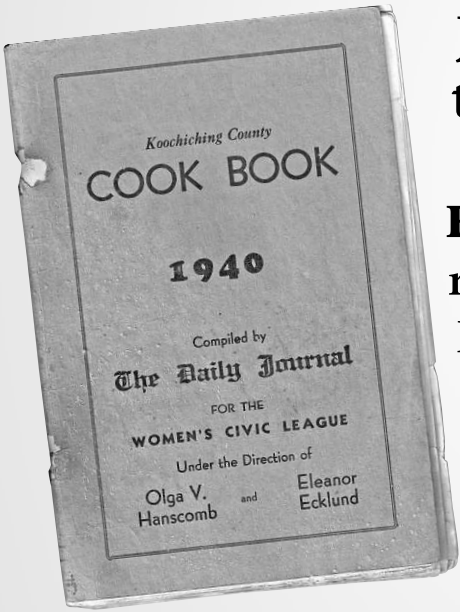
No matter the type of fraud, it's important for Minnesotans to be able to recognize the extent of the problem and what needs to be done to stop it. Insurers, law enforcement, and legislators have been working on identifying solutions.

Thursday, the Senate Commerce Committee's Working Group on Insurance Fraud is meeting for the final time before the 2014 Minnesota Legislative Session opens. The group has spent the last nine months taking testimony about insurance fraud's impact on the state and is finalizing a legislative package to take steps to combat the problem.

But the best way to curb insurance fraud is for consumers to get involved, learning about how to spot the crime and report it to authorities.

For more information on how you can help stop fraud in Minnesota or suspect an insurance fraud situation, call the Minnesota Department of Commerce Fraud tip line at 1-888-372-8366 or call the NICB's tip line at 1-800-835-6422.

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