

Backyard ice time an important tradition for local family



Trevor Stephens' parents purchased their home at 32 Royal Road in 1957. It was a single-story home in a nice little neighbourhood. A perfect spot for the family that planted roots in Canada in 1799.

In 1973, Stephens purchased the same home from his parents. He had some work done to it, adding a second floor and extending the main floor. He's always loved that house but, more so, his family has always loved the outdoors.

They've gone everywhere. The family gets in a car, packs the trailer and drives. They've travelled all the way into the Northwest Territories and to Alaska, to South Dakota, and even to Louisiana.

But in the winter time, of course, driving these long distances doesn't always work. So, around 30 to 40 years ago, Stephens hatched the idea of building a rink in his backyard. Consistently for the past 20 years, he has done it every winter, barring no setbacks from the weather.

?My biggest thing is keeping the family together. Especially now, the last two years. It has been a real problem with social part of family life,? Stephens said. ?Everyone has been indoors on the computers, so, it gets them off the computers. It gets them outside. It's getting the family together that's more important than anything else.?

Over the course of designing ice rinks in the backyard for his family and neighbours over the years, Stephens has perfected making ice rinks now ? and this year is the first he's had boards.

?Somebody was doing some major renovations in the plaza, and threw out five 4x8 sheets of plywood, three-quarter inch thick. That's where I got the wood from,? Stephens chuckled.

On the ground he evened out at the back of his lot, he boarded up the area he intended to use. He placed a large tarp in and around the borders of the wood and laid it flat. Stephens took coloured duct tape and attached it to the tarp going across the ice. For the centrepiece, he took a piece of an old Canadian flag and attached that to the tarp as well.

Then he filled up the one-foot-deep space like a bath tub ? but slowly, or else all the water wouldn't freeze at the exact same time.

At night, Stephens has lights attached to his apple tree that overhangs the rink. These lights are on timers and turn off at 10 p.m.

Stephens' son Kerry, who frequently comes over the house to skate with his children Thomas and Alexis, thoroughly enjoys the rink every year. He tries to come for a skate after work as often as he can and he also brings his children over to skate whenever possible.

?Well as my father said, especially in the last two years, it's binding the family together and it's outdoor socialization. Getting outside, that's the best part and the joy that the kids have,? Kerry said.

?You know my dad hasn't physically gotten on the rink yet but he's getting the joy.?

According to Kerry, this rink has been a hit on a Pittsburgh Penguins fanatics page on social media.

With a lot of family history in Canada and a lot of memories at their home on Royal Road, for Stephens it is a pleasure to keep this tradition going at his home. For however long they intend to live in the home in the future, expect an ice rink in the backyard.

The laughs of his grandchildren, great-grandchildren and the joy from his neighbours who come by to have a skate will be a staple on Royal Road, no matter what way you look at it.

By Robert Belardi