



Activities abound during cold days of winter

NHL hockey legends Marcel Dionne and Charlie Simmer were joined by the infamous Hanson Brothers (Steve, Jeff and Dave) along with Yvon Barrette (Denis Lemieux) of Slapshot fame for the second annual Sylvan Lake Pond Hockey tournament, in mid March, the highlight of the winter season for many around the community and across Alberta.

Dropping the puck for a celebrity game was the world's most famous hockey dad, Walter Gretzky, who joined the festivities on Saturday afternoon.

While the event was hampered by warm weather on its first day (+12°C) more than 200 players hit the ice to enjoy hockey in its rawest form after weather cooled overnight. The tournament featured 55 teams, up from the first year's complement of 32 teams who braved -30°C weather in January. Plans are underway for the 2011 event March 4-6.

The tournament was just one of many activities which kept visitors and residents busy throughout the cold days of winter.

The natural ice of the lake provides lots of opportunities and Sylvan Lake is increasingly taking advantage of those. For many years the town has created two rinks along the shore, one for skating and another for hockey. More recently a tall evergreen tree has been inserted into the ice and strung with Christmas lights while benches and picnic tables are scattered around. Parking is available right beside the rinks and trails are cut in the snow near the beach for other motorized vehicles.

Again this year, the town created a speed skating track in conjunction with Foothills Speedskating Marathon Association which hosted adult and youth 50 km and 25 km races as well as a 2.5 to 25 km tour on the Monday of Family Day weekend in February. The top female racer was Natalya Rybakova, who currently resides in Calgary but is a former Olympic competitor from Kazakhstan. In the men's category, Switzerland's Jan Cafilish from Davos, took top spot. That's an indication of the competitiveness of the event.

The organization hopes to expand to include more European participants and a longer 100 km race during a two day event in 2011.

Sylvan Lakers celebrated Winterfest on the Saturday of the Family Day weekend in February. Among the highlights is the annual polar bear dip, an event which provided an opportunity for 47 jumpers to raise over \$17,000 for 22 different non-profit organizations. The growing festival also includes lots of activities for youngsters

and families. Horse drawn sleigh rides are sponsored by the Rotary Club. The Lions Club serves a pancake breakfast, a challenge hockey game between the fire department and RCMP attracts lots of attention, and Best Body Fitness Human Curling is a real crowd pleaser. New this year was Lakeview Optimist Club's ultimate cardboard sled challenge. And Fox Run Renaissance hosted a remote controlled car rumble. Fireworks over the lake cap off the event in the evening.

For the past six winters the Second Gear Club of Calgary has sponsored a motorcycle and ATV ice racing event drawing hundreds to an oval track carved into the lake for that purpose in late January or February.

Ice fishing is another sport actively pursued by a large group of people, judging from the number of shacks which sprout each winter and are removed about the end of March. Looking for the best place to drop a line, consider the area where the most shacks are located. Among the big fish caught this season was a 23.5 pound 44 inch pike caught by Cory Lind.

Cross country skiing, windsurfing, kite flying and a number of other activities are pursued on the wide open spaces available.

To streamline use of the lake, a designated offloading area for ATVs and snowmobiles was created along with a no-go zone around the skating rinks. Otherwise, providing machines were registered and insured, they were able to make full use of the lake's frozen surface.

Another big event for the community this year, took place at the curling rink when local volunteers hosted the provincial mixed curling championship. Hockey was also a big draw in the community with tournaments taking place almost every weekend in the two arenas across from the curling rink. And for relaxation or exercise, the town's aquatic centre in the same recreation hub area attracted hundreds.



