



## Sad News

**It is with great sadness to announce the passing of Jeff Johnson on April 16, 2021 after a long bout with illness. Jeff was born in Portland Maine September 23rd 1958 where he spent his first 20 years.**



He is survived by his beautiful wife Robin Johnson, their two sons Mathew and Kyle, his brother Wally Johnson, Kim Reale (Sister-in-law) his daughter Kirby, Anthony (Son-in-law) and his two grandchildren Nola and Lucca.

Jeff started his career in lighting in 1977 and spent his first seven years touring with the **Ice Capades** as Lighting Designer and Director.

In 1988 Jeff moved to Los Angeles which later provided an opportunity to work with Siegfried & Roy. Eventually Jeff became the Lighting Director for the Siegfried & Roy Tsumura World Tour. Robin and Jeff met and fell love on that very tour. After the tour Jeff and Robin returned to Las Vegas to open Siegfried & Roy's new show at The Mirage.

Jeff designed lighting for Cher for nearly ten years and earned two Technical Emmy nominations. He also worked on other touring projects including Pat Benatar, Laura Brannigan, REO Speedwagon, Fleetwood Mac, Diana Ross, Madonna, Gino Vanelli, and many more. He went on to designing large special events for some of the major hotels here in Las Vegas.

In 2007 Jeff accepted a position heading up the lighting department for MGM Grand Productions where he continued to focus on corporate clients coming to the MGM Conference Center as well as dealing with all the in-house events throughout the property.

Jeff soon joined Christie Lites in 2011 as a CL Rental Rep and was responsible for bringing one of Christie Lites longest-running continuous tours to the table, UFC.

Jeff and Robin have lived in Las Vegas for well over twenty-five years and shared their home with their two boys. Jeff's daughter Kirby and Son-Law Anthony reside in Maine.

Jeff made a great impact on the entertainment community and will be greatly missed by many. If you ever passed the Johnson's house during the Christmas Holidays you would see quite an impressive lighting show. Jeff loved to cook for his friends and family...and he was best known for his tasty hot chicken wings!

Rest in peace Jeff...we'll keep the lights on!

## Our Alumni in the News

### **Nickel City Nostalgia: The incredible stories Gerty Desjardins can share**

Randy Pascal For The Sudbury Star  
Apr 09, 2021



Gerty Desjardins and Moe Lafrance in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, during their competitive careers.

For the past 52 years, Gerty Desjardins has called Las Vegas home.

This seems all too appropriate, given just how entertaining a life the original queen of the Sudbury figure skating scene has lived.

**Nickel City Nostalgia: The incredible stories Gerty Desjardins can share**

Preparing to celebrate her 79th birthday in August, Desjardins can still spin a tale with the best of them — and there are no lack of tales to be told.

Though she did not take skating lessons until the age of nine, the only child can share some early recollections, courtesy of her mother. The latter is now one year shy of her 100th and “still kicking,” in the words of her daughter, at the Elizabeth Centre in Val Caron.

“I started skating on double runners; I was maybe five years old,” recalled Desjardins. “My mother reminded me about a little carnival that I had skated at — they were all outdoors at the time. We arrived late, but they let me skate and I won.”

Still, it was not as a solo artist where the Northern Ontario athlete truly made her name.

“I have the cutest picture of Moe (Lafrance) and I in Sundridge — we were so young,” she said. “We would do dance as well as pairs when we skated in the North. The dutch waltz was the first dance that you learned. We did that and won in Sundridge, but I think Moe said that there were only two couples there.”

It was, in fact, as a pairs team that Lafrance and Desjardins eventually represented Canada at three sets of world championships, before she turned professional. To reach that point, however, required a little travel. Sudbury may have been the original base, but their training was honestly spread right across the province.

“In the winters, at one point, we really didn’t have anyone in Sudbury who was teaching us, so we kind of taught ourselves,” said Desjardins.

By this stage, a foundation had been set, ironically through a more northerly off-season jaunt.

“I think when I was 11 or 12, I started going to Schumacher (McIntyre Arena) for summer skating,” she stated.

“Because I was going, Moe decided to come up and we started taking pairs lessons from Sheldon Galbraith.”

Coach for the Canadian skating entry at the Winter Olympics in 1948, 1956 and 1960, Galbraith had worked with the likes of Barbara Ann Scott and Donald Jackson.

By their late teens, the local pairs tandem had made the move to follow the World Figure Skating Hall of Famer to the Toronto Cricket Skating and Curling Club. Competing at the Canadian Juniors for the first time in 1959 in Rouyn Noranda, Desjardins and Lafrance ascended to the top of the podium the following year in Regina.

At the senior level, however, Canada was the envy of the world when it came to pairs skating.

Joining the up-and-coming northern duo were the likes of Maria and Otto Jelinek (world champions in 1962) and Debbi Wilkes/Guy Revell (bronze medallists at worlds in 1964). The competitive dynamics were fascinating.

“Debbi and Guy and Moe and I were rivals,” said Desjardins. “We weren’t really rivals with Maria and Otto, just because they were better than both of us.”

Such was the high esteem and friendship that Gerty developed with Maria Jelinek that the latter not only served as the maid of honour to her skating competitor, but was also on hand in Sudbury in 2007 when Desjardins was inducted into the local sports hall of fame.

Not to mention the fact that all three pairs teams were on hand in Prague, in February of 1961, the year the World Figure Skating Championships were cancelled following an airline crash that took the lives of the entire United States skating team.

“We had competed at the North American Championships that year and faced the Americans in Philadelphia,” Desjardins recalled. “We (Team Canada) flew from Philly to New York to take our plane to Prague. They (Team USA) took a bus to get on the Sabena flight. We were in the air, en route to Amsterdam, when they went down in Brussels.”

The drama, however, had only just started to unfold.

In 1948, the Jelinek family had fled Czechoslovakia, eventually settling down in Oakville. While Canadian officials were able to obtain a release of citizenship to allow the young siblings, Maria and Otto, to compete in Prague in ’62, their parents were not allowed re-entry into their country.

As such, it was Desjardins’ mother who had more or less been entrusted with keeping an eye on the still young skaters as the team landed into the surreal setting that was the airport in Prague.

“The army greeted us with guns and grabbed all of our passports, which scared the heck out of us,” recalled Desjardins. “Then, we’re whisked into the terminal and all of a sudden, all of the Czech people surround Maria and Otto. We thought they were doing something to them because Maria started to cry.

“It turned out that she had just been told that all of the Americans had been killed.”

Twelve months later, Desjardins and Lafrance were back in Prague, finishing sixth in the world. In the winter of 1963, it was off to Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, a bittersweet yet memorable conclusion to the amateur career of the proud Sudbury natives, climbing two more spots up the rungs and producing a best ever fourth place finish at worlds.

"The conditions were awful," said Desjardins. "We skated outdoors and at 9 p.m. — my blades were squeaking, that's how cold it was."

It was their final performance.

"At the end of 1962, Moe had started coughing up blood. He was diagnosed with a disease where the veins in your lungs normally have capillaries at the end, but he didn't have any. The exertion of skating would cause the veins to burst.

"It broke our hearts, but especially him, because at least I could move on."

Desjardins did just that, for many years to come.

"There wasn't any money in amateur skating, so it made more sense to go pro," she explained. "Everyone joined the show right away."

The show, as it were, involved committing to either the **Ice Capades** or Ice Follies, both of whom engaged the services of Desjardins over the years. It was there that she met her husband, George Verbiwski, a slapstick ice skating comedian who moved on to work as a stage technician at most of the showrooms on the Vegas strip.

If Las Vegas was her home, the world was her stage.

At various times, Desjardins teamed with either Guy Revell and later Richard Dwyer, performing to capacity crowds in both North America and across the globe.

"Even as amateur skaters, we had a little flair," said Desjardins with a laugh.

"We did a Spanish number that was pretty clever. It started with a black lace dress overtop of a red outfit. When the lace came off, I was dressed all in red, I put on a beret and we did a French number to Edith Piaf."

There is something larger than life to the manner in which Desjardins recalls moments of her past.

"When we moved here, Vegas was run by the mob," she said of her home for the past-half century plus. "But if you weren't in competition with them and didn't do anything, they didn't bother you. They were fabulous."

And this from a 1982 party that gathered the who's who of the skating world for Richard Dwyer's 50th birthday.

"We get a call at Richard's place from Dubai, asking us to do a world tour," Desjardins began. "We left LA and flew to London, and then from London to Dubai. We skated in Dubai, and we always used to stay and teach the kids a little bit during these stops, kids that were mostly ex-patriots.

"From there, we flew Cathay Pacific, with brief stops in India and Thailand, to Hong Kong. From there, we were off, back to Los Angeles. Isn't that neat? I just love that story — that's one of my highlights."

In a life full of highlights, it's been one of many that Gerty Desjardins can still share with zest and laughter — and all with a certain Northern Ontario charm.

# Updated Reunion Information

## New Dates – June 14 - 16, 2022



**Announcing - NEW DATES for the Ice Capades Reunion – June 14, 15, 16, 2022**, at the stunning and spacious **OMNI Resort & Spa, Rancho Mirage (Palm Springs), CA.**

Now that it is unlikely California will be allowing large gatherings in Spring, and our Canadian friends are still being asked not to travel... it became evident we needed to push our event - to 2022. Doing this will hopefully allow for more attendees to be vaccinated. We want to be safe, and allow for as many skaters, and extended Capades family, to be able to attend as possible. Hope you'll want to be there too!

Yes, **if already registered**, your event registration will be transferred to June 2022! While it may seem to be a long wait The Ice Capades Reunion 2022 committee is still excited and committed to providing a fun experience, in what could very well be the last chance to gather 'this many' of us in one spot. Please save any requests for cancellations, for extreme personal situations only. Much appreciated.

**If you already have a hotel reservation**, know the OMNI Resort has moved all reservations over to the new date(s). Feel free to call and confirm, to ease your mind. The 2022 OMNI Resort Reservation Website is not up yet. Know they are working on a skeleton crew, but I am told the website will be Live in a few days. Info regarding the new OMNI Resort website will be posted soon. Our hotel rates, will remain the same in 2022.

We are all getting older. (Still glamorous, but older). And after all this Covid-19 craziness it will be so good to see old friends again! So, please make a plan to come join us, and fully enjoy this special, unique reunion!

[Click here for 2022 registration form, which can be printed out](#)

Click here to register: [New Hotel Reservation Link](#)

The OMNI LAS PALMAS RESORT & SPA is now taking reservations, and can be made by [clicking here](#) or by clicking the link on our Reunion Registration Web page, or from the link on our Facebook Reunion event page, or by phoning (888) 444-6664. REMEMBER: You must use Our Code to get the Discounted Rate: 061420CAPADES .

Questions: -- Stephanie Perom, Event Producer, (310) 962-5908 -Cell, [IceCapadesReunion@outlook.com](mailto:IceCapadesReunion@outlook.com)

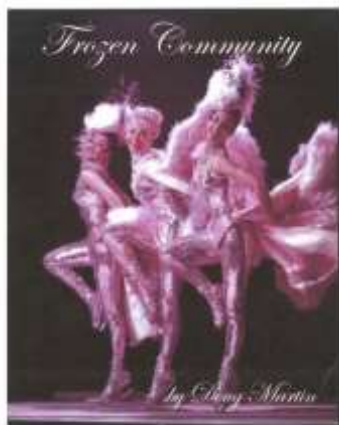
## Video of the Month



In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cranston made a series of skating specials for CBC television. The best of these was "Strawberry Ice" (1982), a fantasy that also featured Peggy Fleming, Sandra Bezic and Val Bezic, Allen Schramm, Brian Pockar and Sarah Kawahara, with imaginative costumes designed by Frances Dafoe. The production won a variety of awards, including an ACTRA Award and was redistributed in 67 countries.

<https://youtu.be/wPylPpOemug>

## RELIVING FOND MEMORIES



Doug Martin had published two books called 'Frozen Community' where he wanted to have skaters tell funny stories about their time on the road. Stories were posted before but worth sharing again.

**Did you ever have 'one of those days'? Ken Shook did – read on -**

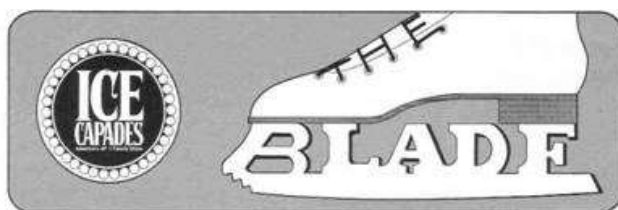
Nineteen seventy-four was my first year with the show. I was in Continental Company, and was Vic Zoble's assistant in his comedy trampoline routine. For those of you not familiar with that number, Vic would be in the audience and after a demonstration of the new sport "Trampoldiving", by a supposed champion, in this instance me, we would ask for volunteers to try the new sport, at which time Vic would come out of the audience. Partway through the routine, Vic would hit a





platform that would fall back to a 45-degree angle. It would appear to the audience that I would save Vic from falling, just in time. But in reality, the platform was secured by a safety wire.

One night the assistants rolled me to center ice, as usual, and I began to stand on the platform, but then they shifted it a bit to center it, and the release came undone. It was still during the blackout, and as I was falling backwards toward the ice I yelled out “Oh, crap!” When the lights came on, I was hanging upside down on this platform, swinging the poles. The assistants got the platform back up, but somehow I think the comedy routine was centered more on me than Vic that night.



The website, [www.icecapadestheblade.com](http://www.icecapadestheblade.com) has been revamped and more information has been added. It's still a work in progress. If you have something to add, please send them.

Look here for **2022 Ice Capades Reunion** information, including the list of **who's coming**

**Cast, Precision & Production Pictures** – Relive some memories.

**Past reunion Pictures** – Check them out for some you may have missed.

**Rosters** – Looking for someone or remembering who you skated with in the show?

**Video links** – have been collecting skating 'You Tube' links from the early years.

**Program Covers** – we had the most beautiful covers

**Past Issues of The Blade** – just in case you missed an issue

**Past Reunion Pictures** – relive the times you attended the reunions

**In Memorium** – remembering those who have left us too soon

Check it out!

## Upcoming Events



**ProSkater Sun Valley, Events, Sun Valley Skating Center, Sun Valley, Idaho:**

ProSkaters Live in Sun Valley Competition - **July 25, 2021:**

<https://proskaters.wufoo.com/forms/s1owo9bg17vp4f6/>

Want to Audition for a Professional show?

ProSkater Live Auditions - **July 26, 2021:**

<https://proskaters.wufoo.com/forms/r18usj7100xonv8/>

ProSkater Workshop - **July 27, 2021**

<https://proskaters.wufoo.com/forms/r18h7hwi1oiyug5/>

**Knoxville Ice Chalet, Knoxville, TN**

ProSkater Live Auditions & Performance Camp - **October 2 - 3, 2021:**

<https://proskaters.wufoo.com/forms/r1fkhswb1jo57s1/>



<http://www.icetheatre.org/>

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