



## Sad News

### Maryfrances Veeck, Ice Capades publicist, (1943-48) resourceful partner to legendary Bill Veeck, passed away at 102

Her husband was renowned for his publicity stunts. She came up with a few of her own. She died Sept. 10 at Montgomery Place retirement community in Hyde Park. By [Maureen O'Donnell](#)



In 1946, Los Angeles Examiner sportswriter Vincent X. Flaherty was interviewing “Ice Capades” star Donna Atwood, who was so famous that Disney based Thumper’s “Bambi” ice-skating sequence on her.

In his column, Flaherty wrote that he was tossing questions Atwood’s way without much thought — most of them about fan mail from lotharios.

Then, “Ice Capades” publicist Maryfrances Ackerman stepped in, suggesting he ask “something sensible.”

“What’s the matter, Flaherty, are you off your trolley?” she asked. “Why don’t you write about Donna’s miraculous rise to the top?... When she was 15, she won the national junior figure-skating championship. ... She still spends much of her time with the servicemen in the military hospitals.

“You’re a sportswriter, aren’t you?” she asked the chastened writer.

Four years later, the publicist married Bill Veeck, of whom she would say, “Keeping up with that man is tougher than keeping track of a couple of hundred people on tour” with the “Ice Capades.”

[Click here to read the complete article.](#)

## Gail Hamula Gross – Oct. 10, 2022



Gail Hamula Gross went to be with her Lord and Savior on Monday, October 10, 2022 in West Bend, Wisconsin with her family by her side. She courageously battled multiple systems atrophy (MSA) for nearly a decade, a rare, progressive and terminal neurological disease. Gail's quiet faith touched many people as a wife of an Air Force Colonel, her many patients in the dental field and as a National, World and Professional Figure Skater.

Gail partnered with Frank Sweiding in East Company from 1979 - 1982.

Her Celebration of Life details will be posted soon at [www.Shimonfuneralhome.com](http://www.Shimonfuneralhome.com)

## **Jan Prasniewski - October 6, 2022**



Jan was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia on January 15/2022. On June 28th he received a stem cell transplant. After spending over 3 months in the City of Hope hospital, he had to be placed in the ICU on a ventilator to fight several infections. Unfortunately he lost his battle on October 6.

Jan was born to Polish parents in Downey, California. He skated out of the Arctic Blades figure skating club competing in various competitions until he joined Ice Capades East Company (1975-76). He then travelled with another show to Atami, Japan for a year. Jan then returned to California and began coaching and shortly after became a world renowned master coach with the professional skating association. He continued to have great success with his skaters including a pair team in the Olympics.

Jan was very passionate about cars (the need for speed) , flying and particularly his love for dogs.

He will be greatly missed- may he Rest In Peace.

# In the News

## Shoreline's Highland Ice Arena to close this week



Highland Ice Arena owner Terry Green, right, chats with skater Sunny Ren. Green and her family opened Highland Ice... (Greg Gilbert / The Seattle Times) By [Moir Macdonald](#)  
Seattle Times arts critic

We think of certain places as being around forever, until suddenly one day they aren't any more. [Highland Ice Arena](#) in Shoreline, open since 1962 and home of

countless skating lessons, hockey practices and hours of mittens hanging out, is closing its doors this month. Sibling owners Terry Green and Rick Stephens, whose late parents James and Dorothy Stephens opened the rink 60 years ago, have made the tough decision that it's time to move on; they're getting older, and so is the building. Oct. 15 will be the last day of public skating at the arena, with the Zamboni — their fifth, in six decades — circling the ice for the last time.

Skating rinks, in some ways, are time capsules; technology hasn't made a dent in how we lace up a pair of scuffed rental skates, hobble to the rink, take a deep breath and step onto the waiting ice. I remember the skating rinks of my childhood and teen years, and they looked a lot like Highland: benches scraped by years of metal blades; a row of enticing vending machines; a sense of timelessness, like the outside world couldn't touch this place where, comfortingly, nothing ever seemed to change.



Highland Ice Arena, on Aurora Avenue North, has been open since 1962. (Greg Gilbert / The Seattle Times)

If you haven't been to Highland for a while but want to drop by before it closes, you'll probably find it's not that different from your skating-lesson days. The pro shop sells skating dresses that resemble what I might have yearned for as a little girl racing

around the ice, and the wood paneling around the front desk once looked more modern than it does now. Paper stars still hang from the acoustic ceiling in the lobby, charming animal murals (painted years ago by Terry's daughter) grace the back hallway, and a black-and-white photo of a young James and Dorothy skating together — his arm wrapped around her waist, their blades shining on the dark ice — is still thumbtacked to a bulletin board.

It's a small, modest photo — you'd miss it if you weren't looking for it — but it's a reminder that Highland Ice Arena started with a love story. James and Dorothy met during World War II at an ice arena in Lachine, Quebec. **She was home on a break from touring with the Ice Capades**; he was a ham radio operator and instructor for the Royal Canadian Air Force who was also an accomplished figure skater and skating coach. They married in 1944 — he was 23, she was 22

— and spent their long lives together, on and off the ice. James [died last November](#); Dorothy [followed just a few months later](#).

The Stephens came to Seattle after the war and co-leased the Ballard Ice Arena through most of the 1950s, but their dream was to build their own rink. They bought a plot of land on Aurora Avenue next to a trailer park in a remote area then called Richmond Highlands and hoped to open during the Seattle World's Fair. A steel strike delayed construction, but Highland Ice Arena finally opened its doors on Dec. 14, 1962. Rick, then 10 years old, remembered his parents expecting maybe 50 to 75 people to show up on the first day. "We got 500," he said, laughing. "That first weekend was crazy."

James and Dorothy's goal, Rick said, was to be inclusive — "to keep bringing in people who just wanted to skate." That meant less emphasis on big-name skaters (though the likes of U.S. Olympians Rosalynn Sumners and Tonya Harding trained on Highland ice early in their careers) or AAA hockey, and lots of open ice time for beginners, or adults who fondly remembered lacing up skates as a kid. "We just wanted people to enjoy it."



Skater Sunny Ren, left, practices at Highland Ice Arena. At right is Terry Green, whose family opened the ice rink 60 years ago. (Greg Gilbert / The Seattle Times)

Though James and Dorothy gradually handed off management of the rink to Terry and Rick and their spouses several decades ago, they remained involved with the arena — including the decision, made a few years ago, to sell the building. No buyers turned up who

wanted to keep it as a skating rink: Thanks to the nearby Lynnwood Ice Center and the shiny-new Kraken Community Iceplex, the north end of the city is oversaturated with places to skate, and it's a seasonal business, one in which it's hard to make a living.

After the final days of business, there'll be one last big reunion of Highland competitive skaters, coaches and judges on Oct. 22. Then the doors will close, with the building eventually demolished and the property [redeveloped with two mid-rise apartment buildings](#), according to the Daily Journal of Commerce. The furnishings are already for sale; the vending machines are empty; the memory boards on the wall show smiling faces of kids who've skated at Highland over the years, in a colorful goodbye.

So that's it for Highland Ice Arena; a good run, to be sure, for a small family business. Terry and Rick say they're sad, but they're ready to move on. It's getting too hard to climb up onto the Zamboni, and the rink never really recovered from the pandemic closures and restrictions with which they carefully complied. Things end.

I dropped by Highland this week, just to smell the cold air of the rink (all rinks smell the same, sort of like snow and anticipation) and get a sense of the place again. I didn't go skating — the last time I did that, with my niece, my ankles protested and I decided my skating days were done — but I watched two women as they quietly shared the ice during a Thursday morning open



skate. Their blades made a delicious crackling sound as they sliced into the ice, sinking into deep edges, gliding into graceful arabesques, moving impossibly quickly. Skating, I remembered, can be like flying. For 60 years, Highland Ice Arena was a place of everyday miracles — a place where blades had wings.

## Video of the Month

### Keri Pickett & Roy Blakey, "The Fabulous Ice Age"

Originally broadcast in 2019, this is a **PBS Utah** interview and very much worth a second watch. For those who missed it the first time around, enjoy! Director's cut.



“The Fabulous Ice Age” chronicles the era of the great American touring ice shows revealing how, with their dazzling production numbers and variety acts, they dominated family entertainment for decades. It also depicts one skater’s quest to keep this history from being forgotten.

<https://video.pbsutah.org/.../keri-pickett-roy-blakey.../>

## Upcoming Events



# All Skater's Reunion – May 1 – 3, 2023

Skaters, cast & crew from all shows are invited to this reunion.

**It is important to note:** —"Why do you need the registration money so soon?"

The people who organize our reunions are putting themselves at risk by committing to the event which involves locking in the dates and the deadlines for the deposits to the events. If you intend to join them for the reunion, please register and include your attendance fee because to move forward, we need a minimum of 125 registered and paid by December 1st.

For folks who want information about the 2023 Las Vegas Ice Show Reunion, DATES: May 1-3 of 2023 (Monday-Wednesday) or are not receiving the newsletter updates, please email us at [HOIFamilyreunion@gmail.com](mailto:HOIFamilyreunion@gmail.com), and we'll put you on the newsletter distribution list.

Online Link to register: <https://www.formpl.us/form/6524508642738176>

[Click here for details & updates](#)

## ICE CAPADES REUNION RECAP



Bob Recker kindly supplied this video from the recent reunion in Palm Springs.  
Click on either link

[ICE CAPADES 2022 REUNION.mp4](#)

<https://tinyurl.com/3chzb9ak>

[Click here for Facebook Reunion pictures](#)

[Click here for David Sadleir's pictures](#)

## Did you know?

February 18, 1959

### 'Capades' Hung Up On St. L. Tornado

Indications point to a forced cancellation of the one-week run of "Ice Capades" at the St. Louis Arena, where last week's hurricane destroyed a portion of the spot. A considerable part of the roof was blown away.

"Ice Capades" was to have started in St. Louis March 16, but it's not likely that sufficient repairs can be made in time for the kick-off.

There's a possibility of extending the show's run in Detroit, and beginning its Milwaukee date somewhat earlier in order to make up the time. A third possibility is playing one of its later stands during that period.

Booking situation at all stands will have to be studied before any commitment can be made. For example, in Detroit a televised hockey game may interfere with the extension of the engagement there.

Show is making an effort to avoid a layoff. Under the "Act of God" clause which could be invoked because of the tornado, the icer would not have to pay its cast in case of enforced idleness.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Sep 26 1947

"Ice Capades" grossed a phenomenal \$314,000 for its three-week engagement at The Gardens, \$5,000 better than last year, when there were two performances more. However, in 1946, the show had to buck the power strike at the tag end of the run. . . .

Variety

Wednesday, January 22, 1969

'ICE CAPADES' HITS \$1,200,000

BOX OFFICE AT GARDEN

THE LARGEST ICE SHOW GROSS IN N.Y. HISTORY HAS BEEN REGISTERED AT THE N.Y. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN WITH THE ENGAGEMENT OF "ICE CAPADES" WHICH SCORED A HUGE \$1,200,000 IN 13 DAYS, DURING WHICH 19 PERFORMANCES WERE GIVEN. LAYOUT WAS SOLD OUT VIRTUALLY BEFORE THE OPENING ON JAN. 7.

## 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.

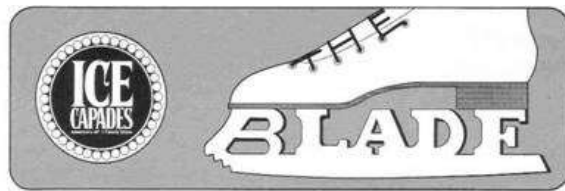
**Karla Wiley** recalls some stories about the use of animals in Ice Capades.

I began skating with Ice Capades when I was 19. I was in an "Old Mother Hubbard" number that used live dachshunds. When the narrator reciting the nursery rhyme got to the line that said "... the cupboard was bare," my skirt lifted up and six dachshunds ran out,



then headed backstage. The audience loved it. The dogs were smart and well-trained. Volunteers were needed to care for the dogs while we were on tour, and for some crazy reason, I volunteered. I'm so glad I did. "Icy," a red miniature doxie, became my responsibility. She was a wonderful traveler. I could put her in a sports bag and she would curl up and sleep until we reached our next destination, or during show time when she wasn't performing. We traveled by train most of the time, and she was with her brothers and sisters most nights.

However, there was a time when the head choreographer and I were to fly to another city. En route, we had a layover. I let Icy out of her bag to do her thing and stretch her legs, then I put her back in the bag. I placed the sports bag under the seat in front of me, and buckled myself in. All of a sudden, the flight attendant was at my seat, asking to look in the bag! I told her it was fine, and we went back and forth for a couple of minutes. Finally she took the bag, unzipped it, and there was Icy. She insisted that Icy go into a dog crate for the duration of the flight, but all this back and forth held up the flight for at least 20 minutes. The choreographer I was traveling with sat elsewhere and never acknowledged us! I was worried how Icy would do, but she was just fine, and lived to be 18 years old. I've had 2 doxies of my own since then, as well as other dogs, but none was as sweet or talented as Icy.



The website, [www.icecapadestheblade.com](http://www.icecapadestheblade.com) has been revamped and more information has been added. If you have something to add, please send them.

Look here for **2022 Ice Capades Reunion** information, including reunion pictures

**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!



# USFA is Looking for Skaters



US Figure Skating for the Centennial Year is reaching out to find and connect former and current members who skated any time in USFS history to reconnect. Please consider registering!!! Share with those skating friends you stay in touch with!!

I can imagine some fun reconnecting events!!!

[Click here for more information](#)

## Upcoming Events



CELEBRATING THE JOY  
OF DANCING ON ICE

Ice Theatre of New York, Inc<sup>®</sup>

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

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