

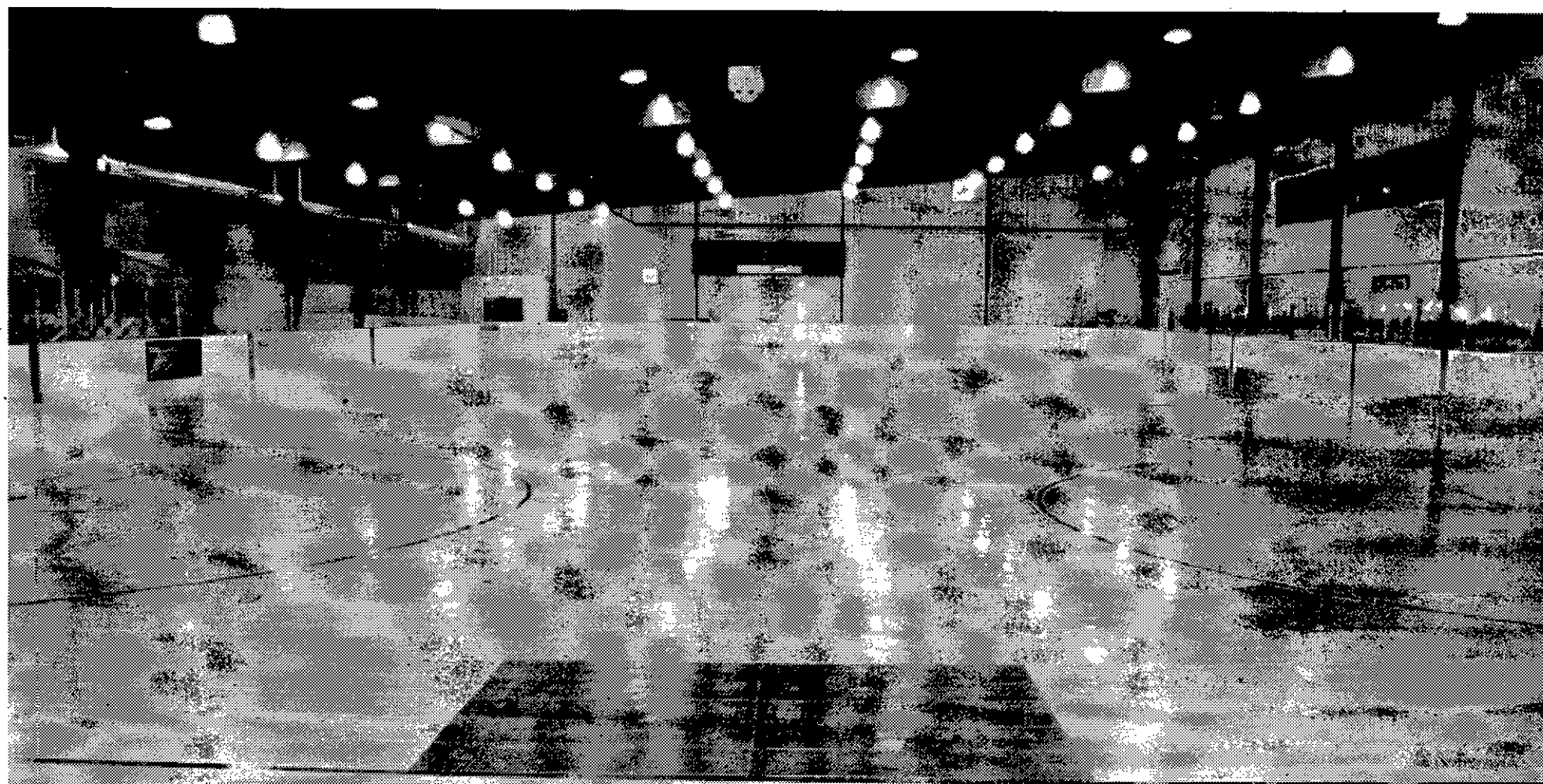
SEPTEMBER
9, 2000

Spotlight Newspapers
The Capital District's Quality Weeklies

September 9, 2000
Family Fun Day and
Season opening celebration

B.I.G.

ARENA



2000-2001 Season Opens with B.I.G. celebration

BY JOSEPH A. PHILLIPS

Truncated though it was, the inaugural season of 1999-2000 for the Bethlehem Ice Group Arena was still a BIG, unqualified success, and there's even more in store for 2000-2001.

The grand opening of the brand-new, two-rink facility came last December, with the Guntner Rink complete and its twin, the Bast Rink, nearing completion. Enough of the locker rooms were open to host the inaugural New York International Hockey Cup

shortly after Christmas, and more in time for BIG to take its February bow as a venue for Section II high-school postseason play. Featured among the teams skating at BIG were eventual sectional champs Saratoga and the Bethlehem Eagles, for the first time on their new home ice.

As the facility was completed in the late winter and early spring, BIG passed some other major milestones. A new sport-court surface covered the Bast Rink in April to accommodate a pair of summer inline hockey leagues, culminating last month in the

BIG Blade tournament. May kicked off a martial arts program, followed in July by a summer dance club for teens and camp programs for youngsters.

"Everything this year has been the first time," said BIG's Mike Mullen. "But you ain't seen nothing yet. We've got a ton of stuff coming to town. Our opening came while we were still under construction, so now we want to give everyone a chance to see what we look like at our finest."

The arena will do so just as it does everything else — in a BIG way. A season-opening bash this weekend — a second grand opening, if you will — will reintroduce BIG to its hometown hosts in Bethlehem and the greater Capital District with activities and events for the whole family, not to mention a gander at the completed facility — to see just how far it's come in the two years since BIG was just a dream.

"We wanted this to become more than just an ice rink," said Mullen. "We're positioning ourselves to become a multi-faceted sports and entertainment complex which will appeal to all age groups. The promise was there last season. This season, it has arrived."

It's obvious to anyone taking a look around the 172-foot lobby — room aplenty for the coming and going of equipment-laden hockey players on a Saturday morning. There one can easily see why the sectional selection committee was so eager to be here, incomplete though BIG was, last February.

"They were very impressed to see hundreds of people come and go in the lobby," said Mullen. "At 172 feet long, you can accommodate a lot of guests."

Facing the Hat Trick Cafe, the facility's brand-new concession stand, the visitor's back is to Dr. Blade's Skate Care Pro Shop, celebrating its own grand opening this weekend (see related story). Flanking Dr. Blade's are the skate rental shop, which offers



The lobby of the BIG Arena welcomes all levels of hockey including the Albany River Rats.

Year in Review

Continued on Page 2

Dr. Blade slides into arena

Page 5

Fun Day Calendar of events

Page 4

Uncle Sam's Skating club

Page 3

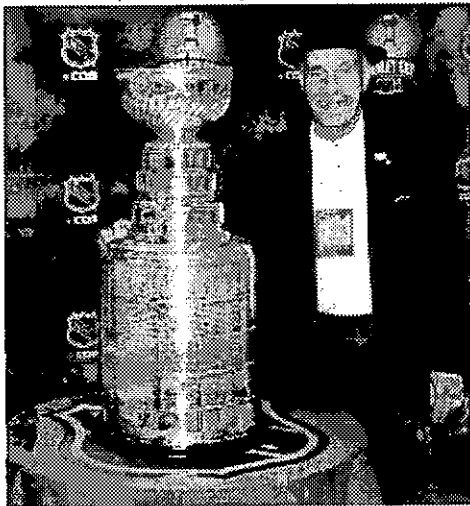
Year in Review

Continued from page 1

dreds of pairs for open-skating participants, and a game room where old video favorites stand alongside newer action-simulation equipment.

On either side of the Hat Trick Cafe bar are the new handicapped-access elevator to the second floor is to the right and the grand staircase to the upper story to the left.

By either route, visitors emerge in the lounge known as The BIG View, so dubbed for its commanding look-down through glass onto the twin NHL-sized rinks that flank it. The Big View's a comfy place for moms to watch Junior's Saturday-morning practices. Not that



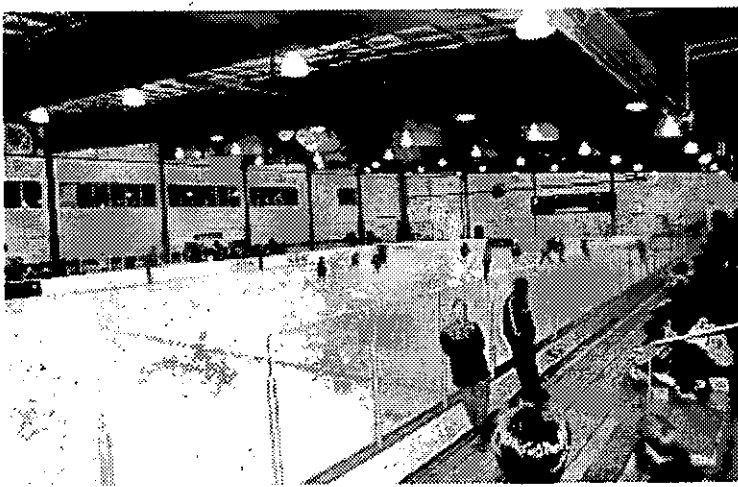
The Stanley Cup and hockey legends visits the arena

it isn't plenty comfy in the stands down at ice level — warmed by overhead heaters — but the view from above isn't to be missed.

The Big View will be a particularly great place to watch the heading-for-the-majors players of the Albany River Rats as they go through their paces. Starting next month, BIG will be the home practice rink for the Rats, the American Hockey League affiliate of the Stanley Cup champion New Jersey Devils. Not that the farm club doesn't have plenty to brag about all by itself, already a past winner of the Calder Cup, the AHL's version of Lord Stanley's big-league hardware, in only seven years of existence at Albany's Pepsi Arena.

The Rats will also launch a select developmental team of outstanding local players this year, the Junior River Rats, who will not only practice at BIG but play their home schedule here — not to mention hosting a January bantam-level tournament and subsequent sectional play.

You can take it all in, in even greater comfort just down the hall from The BIG View, in the cushy confines of the Guntner Rink's skybox room — and right next to it, the exercise room, equipped with state-of-the-art resistance trainers and treadmills, available to Arena patrons. Starting this fall, the exercise room will also be open to a new class of members. Gold Membership, at \$395 for a family of four and \$125 per additional member, will offer free use of the fitness center, public skating programs and skate rent-



The public kept cool at the Guntner Rink this summer.

als, and discounted participation in a host of other rinkside events.

And there will be events aplenty. "One of the things we've found is that if you listen to your customers, the customers will tell you how to use a 76,000 square foot arena," said Mullen. "The creative ideas that come out of this community amaze me. Everyone is coming up with great suggestions for making this even more of a fun place."

For instance, The BIG View lounge was the site of the weekly summer dance club, where DJ's rocked a teens-only crowd and, said Mullen, "offered a good time and a safe place to go during the summertime months." The lounge is also where you find the Moo Duk Kwan martial-arts program, in place since early summer, and new aerobics and yoga programs coming this fall.

Facing the skybox across the hall, and opening into the lounge, is a spacious meeting room that has already

hosted business groups and private organizations, from the local Chamber of Commerce to seniors groups and garden clubs. BIG is equipped to host a variety of private functions, from family reunions and birthday parties to banquets and company retreats.

And all of that is just upstairs.

The main focal point is down at ice level. The Guntner Rink remained open for ice skating all summer, even as Bast Rink became an in-line facility hosting both youth and adult leagues. "The in-line skating leagues will expand tremendously next year," said Mullen, in play from April to mid-August.

As the arena returns to its winter configuration, the eleven locker rooms sandwiched in between — eight for teams, two private locker rooms, and one for referees — will accommodate adult B and C leagues, local programs including Bethlehem and Capital Youth Hockey, the Uncle Sam Skating Club, and phys-ed programs from local schools.

"We're also becoming home ice for a lot of programs," said Mullen. In addition to the Rats and their juniors, that

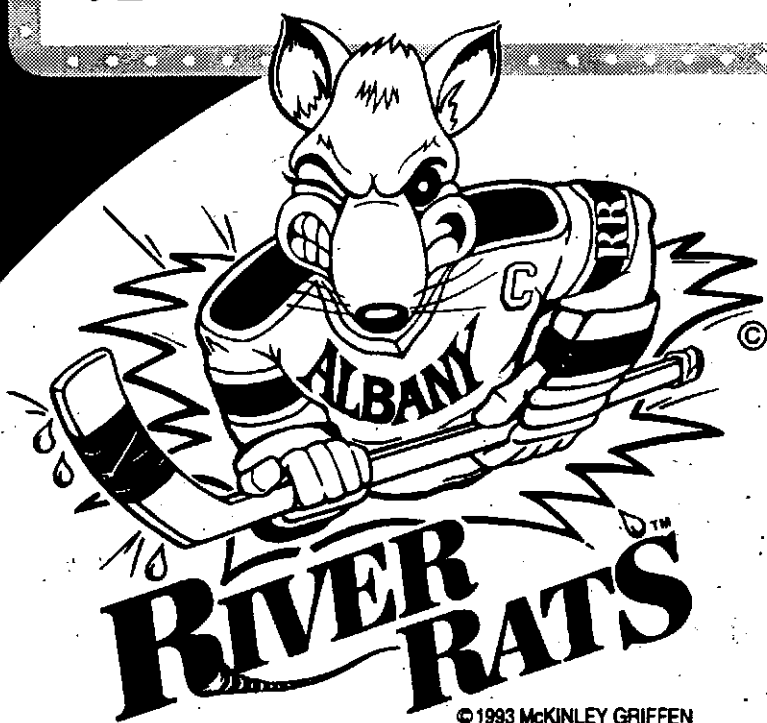
Year in Review

Continued on next page

Best of Luck to the

B.I.G.

ARENA



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For ticket information, call 487-2244
www.albanyriverrats.com

Uncle Sam Skating club equals skating family style at BIG Arena

It is summer but every Tuesday instead of donning bathing suits, the Keir Family of Delmar is lacing up skates at the BIG Arena in Delmar. They are getting ready for their weekly skating lessons with The Uncle Sam Skating Club, a sanctioned member club of The United States Figure Skating Association.

Viviana Marcatile, Brian and daughters, Tara 8 and Devon 9, are expanding their skating skills while staying cool during the eight-week summer session. The group lessons follow the Learn to Skate Curriculum, developed by The United States Figure Skating Association Chevrolet's Skate with Us Program.

The program is designed to safely teach the basic skating techniques using eight levels of skills. The Keir family started with the program in January when BIG Arena first opened. Viviana and Brian attend the Uncle Sam adult group lessons. When Viviana started her lessons, her skills consisted of awkwardly skating forward and lots of

falling. Her goals were not the lofty double or triple jumps of the younger generation. She just wants to be able to comfortably move around the ice, gliding, turning and stopping. The first move she learned in class was the important snowplow stop.

Brian's beginning skills consisted of skating forward on his black figure skates. His repertoire has expanded to skating backward, three turns and the important stop. Most of all, now at the end of summer, both Brian and Viviana have learned the good balance and control they needed to feel confident on that slippery surface.

Tara a third grader at Hamagrael Elementary school, could barely stand and walk on her white figure skates in January. Today after learning the skills of levels one through three she is proudly working on her favorite move, the spiral.

"I'd love to get my spiral as good as Michelle Kwans," Tara said. She is also working on her two-foot spin and would love one day to do a Biellmann spin.



Members of the Uncle Sam Skating club at the BIG Arena

Devon, at first could only stand on her skates. "I couldn't do anything when I started," she said. Now she has learned her first beginning jump, the Waltz jump and someday wants to learn those big jumps, twirling around two or three times in the air. Devon also has her eye on playing ice hockey.

The Uncle Sam Skating program offers a half an hour group lesson followed by a 20 minute free skating time where the children and adults can practice the skills they have just learned. It is during this time that the Keir family enjoys showing off to each other a new

turn stroke or spin. "This is one time where you can learn what your children are learning," Viviana said.

For information about The Uncle Sam United States Figure Skating Association's Learn to Skate Fall Program at BIG Arena contact Donna Sawyer at 439-5921. Lessons will be held on Mondays beginning at 6 p.m. on Oct. 2.

Registration will be held at the arena on Sept. 9 at 1 p.m. during The Uncle Sam Ice Show. It will continue on Sept. 11, 18 and 25 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m..

Year in Review

Continued from previous page

includes the University at Albany hockey program; the Albany Cougars, a hockey team specifically for the physically challenged; and the Bethlehem Eagles, who will play their home schedule on Saturday nights, hoping to capitalize this year on what will certainly be a significant home-ice advantage. And with last season's impressive debut, the arena will likely be a front-runner to host a round or two of sectional play in the coming postseason.

Programs for all ages and skill levels will become a part of the BIG picture as well, with the addition of two professional instructors, Tracie Cavanaugh Director of BASA's Learn-to-skate programs, and Ken Blum, a veteran ice hockey and Rollerblading pro who will offer power skating and in-line programs along with hockey clinics. "He's one of the best skaters I've ever seen, and he's great with the kids," said Mullen.

Advanced clinics will include the Turcotte Stick-Handling School out of Florida, and Ontario-based Rick Heinz

Goalie Schools. The BIG Arena, will offer specialized clinics, like a Russian hockey skills clinic that came calling last June, the Natalia Dubrova figure skating clinic and others.

Speaking of figure skating, the Uncle Sam Skating Club also will be in residence, and there will be open freestyle-skating ice time available on a sign-up basis. And of course, lots of public skating, including special theme nights like a Root Beer Oktoberfest planned for this fall and others as the season rolls along.

And many of this past season's highlights will be back, and bigger. The late-December New York International Cup tourney will expand to some 40 teams from around the country and the world, playing here and at several other local venues — the opening ceremonies will take place in the only local arena BIG enough for the job.

All in all, a pretty BIG season ahead. "People who think we close when the hockey season is over have a lot of surprises waiting for them," Mullen said.



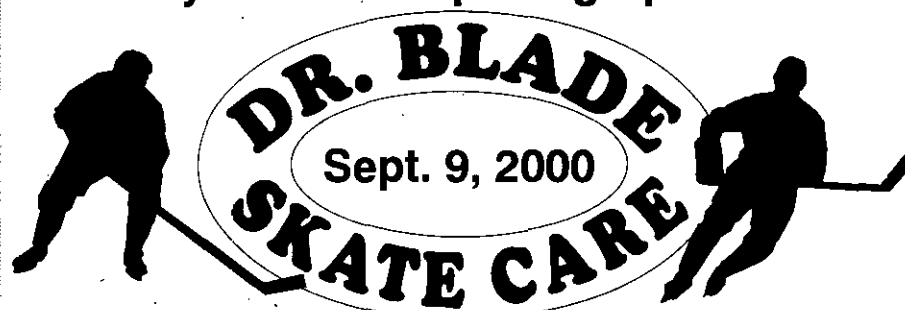
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Family Fun Day and 2000-2001 Season Opener

schedule of events • September 9, 2000

Bast Rink

10:45-11:45	Short Track Speed Skating Exhibition
Noon-2:30	Ice Dream- Learn to Skate
2:45-4:00	Broom Ball Exhibition Game
4:00-5:00	Try Your Luck- Broom Ball
5:00-7:00	Zamboni Rides
7:30-10:30	Family Public Skating

**Dr. Blade Skate Care
Pro Shop
Grand opening
&
Book Signing
(The Essential Figure Skater)**

The BIG View

(second level)

10:45-11:45	Short Track Speed Skating Exhibition Viewing
11:45-12:30	Moo Duk Kwan Club Martial Arts Exhibition
1:00-2:30	Figure Skating Exhibition Viewing
2:45-5:00	Knee Hockey Games



The 172-foot long lobby of the BIG arena is the gateway to the rinks and all of its services while a trip up the main staircase leads to the observation level and workout facilities.

Guntner Rink

10:45-Noon	Christian Brothers Academy Midget Practice
1:00-2:30	Uncle Sam Skating Club Figure Skating Exhibition
2:45-5:00	Public Skating with Rowdy, the River Rats Mascot
5:00-7:30	Hockey Skills Challenge. Ages 7 to 17
7:30-10:30	Teen Public Skating "Under the Lights"

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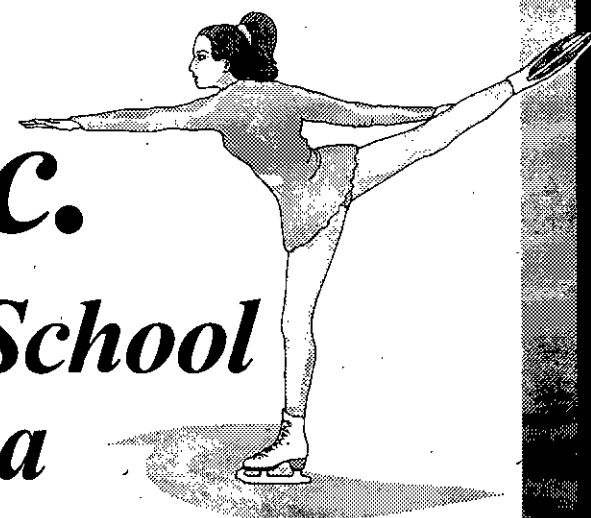
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Dr. Blade's Skate Care carves its way to the BIG time

BY JOSEPH A. PHILLIPS

Sing we now the praises of the well-honed skater's edge.

"Every person, when they step on the ice, needs performance edges to do their thing," said Chris Chapple, BIG Arena's 'Dr. Blade,' whose conversation is peppered with technical talk of the ideal skate radius and other paraphernalia.

"The feel of a perfectly clean edge gives skaters the confidence to maneuver in every skating situation," he said. "It's their link to the ice."

As BIG Arena cuts the ribbon on a new season, the cutting edge is being supplied by the grand opening of Dr. Blade's Skate Care and Pro Shop this weekend. If BIG's success so far is a reflection of the growth of skating sports in the Northeast, the opening of Dr. Blade's in the arena's lobby likewise underlines one of the biggest issues for participants confused by the welter of equipment options available at the local sporting goods chain. From the beginning skater to the pro, a cry goes up for expertise one just can't find in the college kid working weekends in the winter sports department.

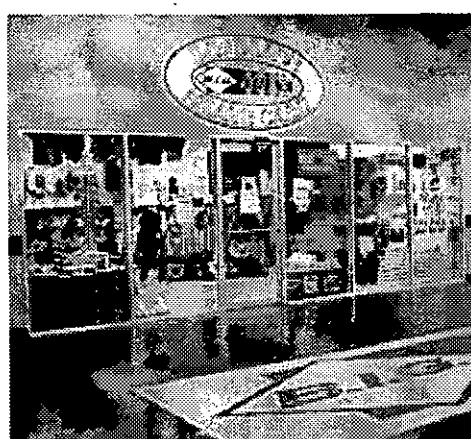
"That's his specialty," said BIG's Mike Mullen of Chapple, who operates Dr. Blade's at BIG. "He's got great chemistry talking to skaters, from the

person who's never skated before to the experts. He knows what each skater needs. When each person comes in, we want to make sure the person is satisfied with good equipment, with the right equipment appropriate to their level of skill, and with the right blades."

Gone are the days of stuffing tissue into the toes of sis's hand-me-down skates and sallying forth. A good-quality pair of figures runs in the hundreds of dollars, and with the amount of safety equipment and specialized items a kid needs before signing up for that first Pee Wee league hockey experience, parents with youngsters starting off in need advice and alternatives before plunking down their hard-earned cash.

Dr. Blade's carries a full line of skates and related equipment for a wide variety of uses. Hockey and in-line brand names include Mission, Bauer, CCM, Jofa, as well as Sherwood and Easton sticks and ITech helmets and equipment; for the figures, there's a full line of Riedell gear, from skates to warmup jackets to skating dresses.

"This shop is much different from any other shop in the area," said Chapple. "We cater specifically to the skater's needs, whether figure skater or hockey player, in-line or ice." Among other things, Dr. Blade's recently laid in a line of hockey "starter kits" for



The new Dr. Blade Skate Care and Pro Shop is located on the main level of the BIG Arena

youngsters, complete with all the necessary equipment for the novice, for \$149, a price that won't send Pee Wee parents crashing into the boards.

Chapple came to BIG with 30 years' experience as player, coach and equipment guru in rinks throughout the Northeast. As far back as his college days, he worked at the Kennebec Arena in Augusta, Maine, "where I think every person in New England came to get their skates sharpened," he said. "There I worked a lot with different professional figure skaters and professional hockey players." He eventually launched a sales career, but kept his hand in as a rink rat, coaching and "playing a lot of hockey."

With his wife, a college administrator, taking a job in the Capital District in 1988, Chapple and family moved to Bethlehem. He consulted for a time with the skate-shop at the USA Rink in Colonie, but his full-fledged return rinkside was prompted by something a lot of suburban hockey parents can identify with: his son Charlie (of late a blueline starter at Bethlehem Central) immersed himself in the local youth game.

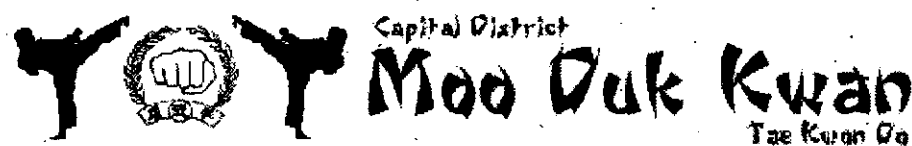
"There wasn't any place in town where I could get my son's skates sharpened correctly," he said. "I had to travel to Schenectady to get them sharpened right." So he purchased a custom radius machine of his own and set up shop in his garage — and soon was honing not only Charlie's blades but those of his teammates as well.

Eventually, word of 'Dr. Blade' got around, and the owners of the Eagle's Nest bike shop on Delaware Avenue "came down and made me an offer I couldn't refuse" — shop space to go into business. From the Eagles' Nest, he stepped on up to the BIG time in June.

Chapple has kept abreast of the specialized needs and equipment options

Dr. Blade

Continued on next page



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The Skating Academy at BIG Arena offers a variety of skating programs, from private lessons to group classes. youth and adult figure skaters, as well as pre-hockey hockey & power skating instruction.

Programs are designed for the very beginner to the more advanced skaters. For information regarding any of the private or group lessons contact the Skating Academy at (518) 439-2211 (ext. 5).

Group classes consist of nine classes, one per week.

They offer skating classes for both

Web site offers BIG information

Are you looking to set up a skating lesson, catch a University at Albany hockey game or find information about the international youth hockey tournament scheduled for the BIG Arena?

Those questions, and others can be answered by logging onto the arena's Web site, www.bigarena.com.

The site also offers information on the arena, directions to the building, a floor

plan, construction photos, a listing of teams and groups that use the arena, complete with contact names and phone numbers, and answers to frequently asked questions.

People wishing to be notified about BIG events can leave their e-mail addresses.

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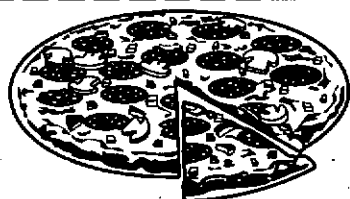


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Beginning Sept. 2000

Dr. Blade

Continued from page 5

of a wide variety of skating specialties — and for all ages. In addition to service and sales of both new and used equipment, Dr. Blade's will also offer "learn to play again" clinics through the BIG Arena for those who've been off their hockey skates for awhile, or are giving it a first try.

Dr. Blade's prescription for strong skating: "A skater must consistently work on strength, flexibility and technique. But your skates are your link to the ice. Real edging requires the right skate with the proper fit, sharpening and custom radius."

To ensure good fit for the serious skater, Chapple often performs a "booto-botomy" to analyze the inner workings of a boot's fit.

"All the new hockey skates are made

of composites, while figure skates are still leather, which mold-in in time," he says. "But when you've got composites, you've got to do specific things to get them right or they can do more harm than good." Dr. Blade's is equipped to perform "bake-overs" to remold ill-fitting boots.

Skate sharpening is performed right in the BIG Arena shop, where it often draws a curious crowd. Exhibit A is the recently purchased state-of-the-art detail head for figure skate sharpening.

"This is the only game in town," he said. And what propels him to being a perfectionist? "It's the love of the game," he says. "And to play it well, the game takes that little thing nobody thinks about. That's the edge." Both the metal and the mental kind.

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above:
The Calder Cup and the Stanley Cup visit the arena.



above:
A team from Austria poses during an international hockey tournament.

left:
Hat Trick Cafe serves food for all.

A Look Back

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Schedule excludes holidays and special events
Schedule subject to change without notice.

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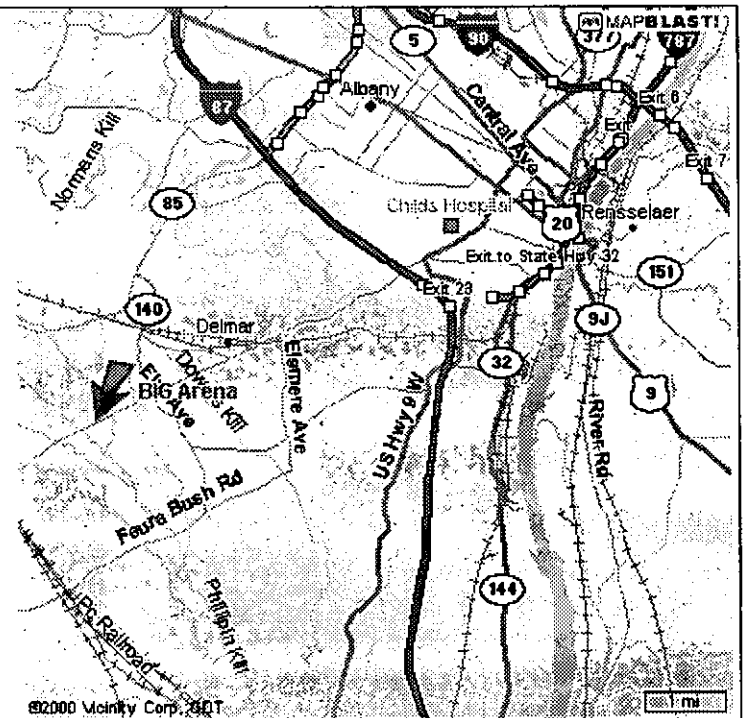
BIG offers special rates for Catered parties camps and groups. They also make the arena available for fundraisers and large private parties. For further information please contact our sales office at (518) 475-9225.



On September 9, the front doors of the BIG arena will be open to the public for Family Fun day to celebrate the opening of the 2000-2001 season.

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