

Lakusta back yard rink a perfect draw to the button for curling enthusiasts

When a back yard rink is mentioned most people think hockey, but Don Lakusta has an outdoor curling rink on his farm north of Redwater.

"I love curling," Lakusta said. "I just love the game, pure and simple." His ice multi-tasks. "We do play hockey there, too."

He learned to make ice growing up in Edmonton. "We had a rink at home," he recalled. "It stuck with me."

He first made his own back yard curling rink 10 years ago. It was a place he could spend time with his boys, Doug and Darryl.

"They'd come out on weekends to skate and to curl," he said. "They actually learned how to skate on the rink, using chairs. Now my kids are involved in making the rink. They've learned how to build ice."

After nine years of making ice the hard way, this season Lakusta made his curling rink with the Hack To Hack Solutions rink liner.

"It made a big difference this year, with the easy sheet," he said. There is no measuring, no painting, and warm days in the middle of winter don't mess with the lines.

"Now it can go up to 20 above and it doesn't matter," said Lakusta. In fact, on warm days the ice beside the rink liner softens up faster than the curling sheet.

"We've gone into mid March, and that was with painted lines," said Lakusta. "I'm expecting it to last

longer this year." That is, if the weather co-operates.

"We've had our fun, we've had our troubles," Lakusta said. "Leaves blow on and melt into the ice and you have to pick them out. If you take care of it, it's not hard to manage." Sometimes the ice sits under the snow for a short time, then they scrape it off, pebble it, and play. The rocks are coffee cans filled with ice and capped with a chrome handle.

"They're actually better than curling rocks; they don't break the boards," said Lakusta. "It's Jam Can curling. That's the way they used to do it." The rocks are light and the rink surface is short, a formula for success for even the most inexperienced curlers.

"First time curlers usually have success," Lakusta said. The games can get pretty competitive, but he has a couple of rules to keep things fun.

First, no one sweeps. "Cause that's work and we're there to have fun," he said. "Besides, people might hurt themselves."

Second is a fairness rule. When two rocks are very close, they are not measured to see which team gets the points. The points automatically go to the team losing the game.

Lakusta is always willing to host special curling guests and holds a popular annual New Years Eve bonspiel. He is a member of both the Lancaster and Thorhild curling clubs and also plays in Redwater.

His connections to the larger curling world began many years ago as his family curled with the Ferbey family. Randy Ferbey is a Canadian and World



Back Yard Rink owner Don Lakusta freezes down the Hack To Hack Solutions curling rink liner he used this season.

champion curler.

"My brother went to school with Randy," said Lakusta. "I curled with Randy's brother, Tracey. I curled with Murray Ursulak." He remains friends with Randy Ferbey and attends briers to watch him compete.

Three years ago Lakusta and Grant Cook partnered up to share their passion for curling through creating limited edition prints about curling.

Their first set contained five Back Yard Rink pictures. They now have seven prints for sale, and this spring during the World Curling Championship being held in Edmonton, will release two more.

"Something special is coming for the Worlds," said Lakusta. "It'll be unique."

He is excited about the new pictures. The original prints have proven popular gift items and have been shipped all over the world.

"The idea behind all of this was to share the game," he said. "When The Briar (Canadian Championship) was here in 2005 we donated a full set

(five prints)." The set, which was autographed by Ferbey's Team Alberta and Adams' Team Nova Scotia, was sold during a live auction raising funds for the Hec Gervais Scholarship Foundation and the Sandra Schmirler Foundation for \$2,600.

"We were floored," Lakusta said. He plans to donate to that fundraiser again in 2007.

"The charity, that's important," he said. "If Randy Ferbey's willing to shave his head, we'll ship one of these down."

LEGAL / NOTICES

COUNTY OF THORHILD GRAVEL HAULERS FOR MARCH 2007 HAUL

County resident ratepayers with trucks and other equipment wanting to work for the County in 2007 must register their equipment or they will not be contacted to provide equipment or services. The County will be hauling gravel in March 2007. Any trucks hauling gravel must be winter equipped with working vibrators. This mainly applies to clam and belly dumps, which are prone to plugging in spring gravelling. Any trucks that cannot make their spreads will not be used. The County will haul approximately 33,000 tonnes of gravel in March 2007. Anybody with questions or concerns about this issue or wishing to register their equipment, please contact Rick Nietupski, Public Works Director at (780) 398-3977.



Cheering a good throw during the annual New Years bonspiel held on Don Lakusta's back yard rink.

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