

■ COLUMN

Curling club quiet to wind down 2017

Several bonspiels coming up in Middleton in January

Karen Sotvedt

Throwing rocks



Things were quiet at Middleton Curling Club in the week between Christmas and New Year's. League play closed down for the holiday and the only events were a few family get-togethers and office parties. Then the icemakers took over to do a complete overhaul of the ice, and for several days, there was a lot of activity in the ice shed.

MCC starts the New Year with two bonspiels that host curlers from around the province and to make sure that there is the best possible ice surface for competition play, a completely new surface is created. The existing ice surface is cleaned and flooded to add a few new layers of ice. When this is completed and cured, the whole thing is burned with a special propane unit with a 14-foot wide heating element the

melts the top layers of ice and evens out irregularities. The melted water is vacuumed off, which removes any dirt that has accumulated to leave an entirely new, smooth playing surface. The signature "pebble" or slight bumpiness in the ice that is necessary to make curling rocks actually curl is not added until just before play, when the last manicuring of the ice takes place.

The science of curling ice is something that requires both training and experience. Years ago, head icemaker Ernie Killen undertook the required courses so that Middleton could continue to have a club when it could no longer afford a paid icemaker. Today, all the work is done by a team of volunteers, to whom Ernie has handed down all he knows, and who have also benefited from visits from the Nova Scotia Curling Association icemaking representative Tony Stirling. He shares tips to assist in the ice work but also ensures that there is uniformity in the ice for provincial events.

In addition to the ice, careful attention is given to the rocks, which get reground to assure that there is no wear or irregularity caused by the constant impact of granite on granite.

League play resumes the week in the latter half of this week, and then the two-day January Thaw is hosted at the club on the weekend of Jan. 13-14. Community members are invited to drop in and see some live curling with games starting at 8:30 a.m. and continuing until late afternoon each day.

The Friday night Chase the Ace resumes on Jan. 5, with doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the draw taking place at 8 p.m. All are invited to the popular end-of-week get-together with the club bar open, snacks available and all to benefit the club's youth programs.



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Check out all our events at

www.middletoncurlingclub.com