

Skates on, Danbury

News-Times Staff

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As a reporter in Westchester County, rewind to the early 2000's, I was sent to cover the story of Brewster High School hockey players and their parents, who wanted to have an "official" high school hockey team.

To lay the groundwork for a school hockey team, kids and parents had to show interest (get some skaters), form a club team (total cost being the burden of parents and players), then eventually have an official School Board-sanctioned and approved team. That dream eventually became a reality for Brewster.

Let's make it happen in Danbury.

The foundation has been set, and many are involved, but they need your support. Last year, the Danbury Hockey Booster Club was formed.

"Right now, there are 50 families involved, tracking 75-80 kids," said Booster Club President Bryan Powers. "We've been asked to prove interest and we have it."

Powers said the goal is to get to the younger ages, so when they get to high school, they are competitive and ready to play. Right now, kids involved in local hockey and Booster Club programs range from ages 6 to 16-plus.

Danbury Police and Fire Departments heard about the call to action, and they wanted to get involved.

Their hearts are already dedicated to hockey. Both departments work together to hold an annual Danbury Police vs. Danbury Fire Charity Game, but besides that, police and firefighters are active in the Danbury Ice Arena in the Adult League year-round.

The two departments teamed up to host free clinics for Danbury kids not only to spark their interest, but also to get them thinking toward the future.

"Danbury is the second largest high school in the state and they don't have hockey," said John Kapinsky, president of the Fraternal Order of Police. "Danbury has become a hockey town and this is a long term project."

Kapinsky said they started the ball (puck) rolling with the free clinics, and they've had great success.

"It's great for the kids to see us in different light," Kapinsky said. "Not just writing tickets or arresting the 'bad guys'."

"We brought kids from a lower income housing project that would have never had the opportunity to get on the ice and the response was phenomenal," he added.

Danbury Ice Arena also stepped up to the plate.

"The Danbury Ice Arena has been very supportive, working with us and giving us ice time. They have also allowed the Booster Club Board members to meet there," Powers said. The Arena also offered skaters the loaned equipment they needed.

"It's a win for everyone, the kids, the rink and all of us. On top of that, it's important for the police and fire members to spend time with the community."

Booster Club board member, clinic volunteer and Danbury Police Officer Ken Utter agreed.

"Playing a sport gives discipline and structure. I know when I was in school, I wanted to play football. If I didn't keep my grades up, I didn't get to play. It kept up my academics and it kept me out of trouble, because there is always trouble to get into," Utter said.

Besides the option of a club team, there is also the possibility of a co-operative hockey program with surrounding schools.

Proposed schools include Bethel, Brookfield or New Fairfield.

"A co-op team would, of course, cut the funding in half, but the decision comes down to the Athletic Director, who will decide who the team will partner with, and the school board," Powers said. The cost of a co-op team would be \$15,000-\$20,000, he estimated.

The Booster Club board members, players, parents, and members of the Police and Fire Department plan on coming out in full force when the school board meets on the proposed team issue.

That meeting will be at the end of May, or a proposed date of June 11. Watch the calendar to get involved.

In the meantime, Powers plans to meet with Mayor Mark Boughton to garner his support.

What can you do? Go to the Booster Club Web site and register as a supporter at www.danburyhockeybooster.com.

Meetings are the first Wednesday of the month and once you register, you will be on the mailing list.

"The co-op option is a bridge, with the goal of both schools eventually having their own program," Powers said. "The numbers are high and the talent is competitive."

Danbury High School Athletic Director Chip Salvestrini is working with the Booster Club.

"The goal is to get funding from the outside community," Salvestrini said. "And the goal is to have a decision before the end of the school year."

You can also go to the Danbury Public Schools Web site, click on Danbury High School and forward your support or comments to the board members.

Come on Danbury -- look toward the future of a hometown school hockey team to cheer on. Take action to keep our youth in action.

You know I usually say "Sneakers on" but today it's"! Skates on!

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