

# a labour of love for Newton group

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Gail Catena remembers skating on the Newton outdoor rink when she was 10 years old.

Nearly 45 years later, you can still find Catena at the northeast Edmonton rink. On Saturday afternoon, the 55-year-old crouched along the base of the old oval, paint roller in hand, as she worked with a revolving crew of 20-odd community volunteers — made up of both new and longtime residents — to revitalize a neighbourhood staple.

“It’s home,” Catena said of the rink and the Newton community league. “There’s a lot of people who’ve grown up here, went to the school, moved away and come back to this neighbourhood.

“I’m happy here,” she said, adding she moved away briefly but eventually returned to her roots. “If I wasn’t (happy), I would’ve never come back.”

Saturday marked the third annual Community League Day in Edmonton, which saw 155 community leagues organize more than 90 events, ranging from corn roasts and petting zoos to pie contests and horse-drawn wagon rides. For Newton, the celebration consisted of tearing down the neighbourhood’s deteriorating sporting venue to continue building upon its history, memories and relationships.

“This is community at the most basic level, and it’s great to see when that sort of thing happens,” said David Dodge, president of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.

The Newton community is a quiet area just north of Highlands that features tree-lined streets, quaint houses and friendly faces enjoying a walk around the block. More than 4,000 people call the area home.

According to city statistics, more than 65 per cent of its residents have lived in the neighbourhood for more than five years.

The rink, built sometime in the 1960s, was once home to NHL hockey names such as Johnny Boychuk, currently a defenceman with the Boston Bruins, and goalie Pete Peeters, who retired as a Philadelphia Flyer in 1991.

Aside from being used for pickup games of shinny hockey, many other events such as movie nights are held annually in the rink. The community hall next door is also a well-loved retreat, often rented out for large Thanksgiving dinners or bridal showers.

Last winter, rotten boards meant the rink couldn’t open. The league was quoted around \$70,000 for a contractor to rebuild it. The other option was to tackle the project on their own for around \$7,000.

Thanks to a few helping hands, the league now hopes to open the brand-new rink sometime in mid-October.

Rebuilding the rink is personal for Lori Grice. Last March, the rink volunteer’s daughter was attacked in the park by a man who threw a substance in her face.

That was a scary time, and for Grice, who is the Newton Crime Watch director and a newcomer to the area, maintaining a community’s strength begins with events like Community League Day and projects like the Newton rink. Not only does it keep youth off the streets, but it acts as a hub where residents can develop the relationships they need to stand up for each other.

“I took it on as an initiative to make this a wonderful place to live and a safer place.”

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