

Brine leak cuts curling club's season short

By Angelica Ingram

Darrell McQuigge jokes that he didn't send in his letter to Santa Claus on time this year.

The vice-president of the Wilberforce Curling Club is cheerful and optimistic despite the fact that on Christmas Eve the doors to the club closed due to a brine leak that could not be fixed.

As a result, the club has had to cut its season short and will not be re-starting curling for the winter season, said McQuigge.

The vice-president points to a very old piping system and mild temperatures in December that led to a problem with the curling equipment, eventually causing it to fail.

"The club is open but the curling itself is done for the rest of the season," said McQuigge. "I said I couldn't get the letter to Santa early enough to ask for a new rink."

While the executive was hoping they could keep the ice running until March, that simply wasn't the case this year.

McQuigge said the club's membership was notified immediately about the status of the club, as well as the executive's plan of action.

Executive members contacted the Haliburton, Minden and Bancroft clubs, looking for help and were offered support immediately.

"We're down but we're not out," said McQuigge. "All three clubs ... there was no hesitation whatsoever ... the timeliness was unbelievable, it blew me away, it was very humbling."

The club was set to host three major bonspiels from now until the end of the season in March, all of which are a large source of revenue for the organization, said the vice-president.

The Jan. 16 mixed bonspiel is now set to take place at the Minden Curling Club, the Feb. 20 Don Fevreau ladies bonspiel will happen at the Bancroft Curling Club and the March 19 men's bonspiel will be at the Haliburton Curling Club. Details on each event will be made known as soon as possible.

As of right now the executive is in discussion with area clubs to try to arrange ice time for their various leagues, said McQuigge.

"We're trying to see what makes sense," he said.

The club executive is meeting with the municipality of Highlands East this week to discuss the future of the curling club, as the building belongs to the municipality.

Along with the municipality, the executive is also meeting with Wilberforce Elementary School to look at options for the popular phys-ed program the club has been running with the students for the past few winters.

"We're going to look at alternatives on how we can still teach the kids the sport and figure a way of getting them to one of the curling clubs to do testing and earn their badge," said McQuigge.

The vice-president says the goal is to have curling up and running again by the fall, possibly by replacing the entire floor.

"The system is 40 years old," he said. "We had leaks in October when we were starting up and we fixed them but the pipe is so brittle you touch it and it just crumbles. We were kind of nurturing it along, hoping it would hold up until the end of March."

Although curling has come to a halt the club is going to keep its doors open, at least for one night of the week.

The plan is to keep the club running as a social hub for the community, said McQuigge.

Currently the curling club has about 54 members.