



## *Celebrating Iowa's Winters A Partnership Event*

The weekend of February 1-3, 2008 marked the first Des Moines Winter Games. The level of participation and fun created by the events as well as the media coverage received indicates that Iowans do celebrate winter . . . one of the major goals for this new program.

Des Moines Park and Recreation staff initiated the idea of a winter festival during a special brainstorming session last summer. Research on similar events in other markets helped establish the following goals:

- encourage central Iowans to be more active during the winter months
- get people into the parks and facilities they normally would not visit during the winter months
- promote healthy lifestyles through non-traditional winter games
- celebrate Iowa's winters

Meetings with Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, a winter recreation facility in Des Moines, resulted in a partnership. The agreement detailed the respective roles and responsibilities of each agency and established a Local Organizing Committee (LOC) to make decisions on program offerings, marketing, sponsorships, promotions, fees, etc. Initially six events were planned, but the slate of offerings quickly grew to seventeen as word about the new event spread and new partners were brought into the organization.

Keys to this year's successful event were: establishing partnerships with local recreation organizations; securing media and corporate partners; obtaining financial support; and identifying and rescheduling winter activities that were already occurring. For example, Des Moines Parks and Recreation has for many years hosted a Snowball Softball Tournament. Incorporation into the Winter Games benefitted the tournament through increased participation, built-in audience, and sponsorship support. The successful history of the softball tournament offered the new winter festival a sure-winner for its slate of events. The same held true for the existing Des Moines Disc Golf Association's annual tournament.

The first-ever Des Moines Winter Games drew over 2,000 participants in team events ranging from flag football, softball and broomball tournaments to

individual competitions including disc golf, golf, cardboard sled, snow kayak, snow-mountain biking, 5K running and 5K snowshoe competitions. The Children's Snow Carnival featured snowball-throwing, snowman-building, snowshoe-racing, and a snow-mountain "big-dig" for prizes. Fifty-six hardy individuals registered for the "Polar Plunge" into the icy waters of the Sleepy Hollow lagoon. And, of course, several men's and women's ski and snowboard competitions were held in adult and youth brackets. Overall the events drew an estimated 4,000 participants and spectators.

The City of Des Moines' year-old refrigerated ice rink, Brenton Skating Plaza, provided free Learn-to-Skate programs and skating exhibitions - as well as guaranteed ice - for the broomball tournament. The Grandview College Department of Design coordinated and managed the College Mascot Challenge, in which local college teams sculpted designs from 10' X 10' blocks of snow in a 24-hour snow-sculpting contest.

Sleepy Hollow Sports Park was a must-have partner as they were able to provide the downhill terrain and "guaranteed snow" despite the inevitable January thaw the week of the event. Parks department dump trucks - in a reverse-role from their usual agenda of snow removal - hauled snow from Sleepy Hollow into the new downtown Western Gateway Park for the kids' events.

Media support was imperative to the success of the Des Moines Winter Games. Representatives from the LOC met early-on with local television and print media to pitch the new event and solicit proposals detailing promotional partnership bids. The games received over \$45,000 in KCCI-TV and Cityview weekly newspaper advertising value at a cost to the Winter Games of approximately \$15,000, in exchange for exclusive media sponsor rights.

The final and most critical link to a successful event was securing a title sponsor - a difficult task with a first-time event having no history of success. Toyota of Des Moines agreed to be the title sponsor supporting the first Des Moines Winter Games. They received television and print coverage and were allowed on-site show vehicles, posters and banners as well as advertising on the front and back covers of the program brochure and on all event t-shirts.

The City of Des Moines Park and Recreation Department and Sleepy Hollow have already received requests to add ice hockey, ice fishing and snowmobile events for THE SECOND ANNUAL DES MOINES WINTER GAMES, which will likely be expanded to two weekends in 2009.