

BOULEVARD

When it opened, Iceland was an immediate success, regularly filled with hundreds of skaters. It hosted ice skating clubs, hockey teams, birthday parties, weddings and hundreds of ice shows, which became its lifeblood. Hundreds of couples met there and later married, including Terrie Kerth's parents. Iceland was once the heart of Del Paso Boulevard.

Though thousands of skaters called Iceland their second home, North Sacramento went through a decline beginning in the 1960s. Businesses closed as the crime rate rose, and Iceland suffered. The rink held its last ice show in 1975, and was sold in 1977. Four years later, the buyer – discouraged by the lack of business – returned the rink to the Kerth family.

Soon after, longtime Iceland skater Chris Lord arranged to become manager of the rink. But it was veteran ice show skater John Johnson's "Magic To Do" spectacular – the first show in six years – that helped spark the rink's revival. Conjoined to that was the retail renaissance beginning along Del Paso Boulevard.

Then, tragedy. On March 28, 2010, a five-alarm arson fire destroyed the 70-year-old wood building, which was not insured against fire loss. In the end, there wasn't much left but generations of memories – which proved enough to raise a version of Iceland literally from the ashes.

"The fire blew off the new roof and everything burned," Kerth recalled. "The only things left were the marquee out front and the metal pipes under the ice. The equipment used to freeze the ice was protected inside the American Ice Company next door. So we had the ability to make the ice; we just didn't have an ice rink anymore."

Because the official post-fire cleanup bid was \$27,000, the Kerths went to the media, asking for volunteers. She hoped maybe 50 people might show up on that rainy weekend. Instead, 253 arrived, ready to work.

"The family said, 'With this much support, we ought to be able to do this,'"

she noted. Still, the obstacle was huge. "My brother Rob and I kept saying to one another, 'What would Dad have wanted us to do?' And we decided he would have wanted us to at least get it open again," Kerth said.

For the next 10 months, "hundreds of people showed up every weekend and most weeknights. Finally, we were ready to open as an open-air rink."

That patched-together facility was much more rudimentary than it is today. "Every year, we've added improvements," Kerth said. "It took a lot of hard work and donations to get it up and running."

Iceland drew 20,000 skaters during its 2018 season (Oct 31-Feb. 17). "It would have been more, but we get rained out and winded out," Kerth said. "All the worst things about an ice rink live right here, yet still the people come."

Happily, an Iceland renaissance is coming, thanks to \$1.3 million in funding from the City of Sacramento to restore the property – including replacing the roof, which will return it to year-round indoor status. An additional \$300,000 will be needed to finish the venture, expected to come from a fundraising campaign.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for March 2020, with completion by November – just in time for the rink's 80th anniversary.

"We know how to run a first-class ice rink, which is what we'll have when we're done," Kerth said. "It will be much easier than running this one."

📍 ICELAND SKATING RINK

1430 Del Paso Blvd.; 916-925-3121. The rink is open through Feb. 17. Information: www.skatesacramento.com. Take 30 minutes to watch the award-winning 2011 KVIE Iceland documentary, "Frozen In Time."

Iceland Ice Skating Rink will host its Annual Holiday Show three times this season, starting at 7 p.m. The dates are Dec. 21, Dec. 28 and Jan. 4. Purchase tickets at 916-925-3121 or at the door.

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