OUT & ABOUT from the Resident and Fellow Affairs Committee

Where members of the Resident and Fellow Affairs Committee recommend their favorite scenes outside UCSF.

Ice Hockey in the Bay Area

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Did you know there are more than 13,500 adult, amateur ice hockey players registered with USA Hockey in the state of California alone, which is the second highest in the country only to Michigan (22,500)? Once you start paying attention, you notice hockey sticks in the backseats of cars; people with gigantic duffle bags walking into ice rinks; and men and women at public skate with fancy moves like crossovers skating backwards faster than you skate forward. If you think hockey is only played by those with anger management issues who are missing teeth you are sorely mistaken! In fact, we’d be willing to bet you have worked with at least one or two ice hockey players at UCSF in your tenure here, who still have all of their teeth and haven’t ever punched anyone during a game. The Bay Area has so much to offer to those of us with a love of this often misunderstood sport.

Ice Rinks
There are rinks all over the Bay Area that offer ice ideal for playing hockey, figure skating, and other ice sports like curling, as well as simply for an hour or two of ice skating. Public skate times, which are offered at all of the rinks listed below, are perfect for honing your skills, entertaining your children, or just doing something different for a couple of hours. Some of the more popular rinks in and around San Francisco are: Yerba Buena Ice Skating and Bowling Center, San Francisco (www.skatebowl.com); Ice Center at San Mateo (www.icecenter.net/sanmateo/); Belmont Iceland (www.belmonticeland.com); Ice Oasis, Redwood City (www.iceoasis.com); Ice Center at Cupertino (www.icecenter.net/cupertino); Sharks Ice at San Jose (www.sharksiceatsanjose.com); Sharks Ice at Fremont (www.sharksiceatfremont.com); and Oakland Ice Center (www.oaklandice.com).

Lessons and Practice
Like any hobby or sport, with hockey, practice makes perfect! While you may wear your ever-stylish and very flattering hockey gear to public skate (which is highly recommended to avoid injury), you cannot take your stick or pucks on the ice. Therefore it is advisable to attend open ice times for hockey players, which are affectionately called Stick and Puck Time or Gretzky Hour (you cannot go on the ice without full gear). These are often held at odd hours and can get very full, so get there early and be ready to dodge pucks and crazy skaters! In addition to these practice times, the rinks mentioned above also offer group hockey skills and skating classes as well as private lessons.

Where to Play
So, we’ve convinced you and now you want to play? The best way to play in the Bay Area is to join a league. For men, there are leagues that play at the rinks listed above. Many of these rinks also host co-ed leagues. Keep in mind that it can be very difficult for men to get onto a league team. Most teams are formed through invitation only or try-outs. However, some of the beginning divisions/leagues are linked to hockey classes at some of the rinks mentioned above, so that’s always a good way in.

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For women, the premiere league (we both play in this league, so we are biased!) in the Bay Area and also the largest women’s league in the country is the Northern California Women’s Hockey League (NCWHL). There are four divisions to accommodate all levels of play – beginner to absolutely amazing! It is a fun, collegial environment and no prior hockey experience is required (that’s how Amy Day started a year ago after only skating a few times as a kid!). The league hosts several Give Hockey a Try Days throughout the year for women to preview the sport. The league provides all needed protective equipment for these GHATDs, as they’re affectionately known, and all coaching is by women—including Ellen Haller! (www.ncwhl.com). Other opportunities to play in a hockey game or two in the Bay Area are regularly occurring pickup games at most of the rinks listed above (schedules can be found online). Some games are more challenging than others, so it’s a good idea to call ahead to know what you are getting into.

Where to Buy Gear
Be forewarned…hockey gear can be expensive, but once you buy your equipment you’ll have it for a really long time unless you really catch hockey fever and want to upgrade to the next best thing! While there is a lot of it, most individual pieces of equipment can be purchased relatively inexpensively. However, spending a little more money on your skates isn’t a bad idea. Local purveyors of a wide selection of gear as well as excellent customer service and vast knowledge include Hockey XSport in Oakland (http://www.hockeyxsport.com) and PowerPlay Hockey in San Jose (http://www.powerplayhockey.com). And as with any type of shopping, you can always find great deals online.

Watch Hockey
If even after reading about the abounding opportunities to play hockey in the Bay Area you still aren’t ready to jump on the ice, maybe you should consider going to a game to see how the professionals do it.

The San Jose Sharks have been representing the Bay Area in the NHL at HP Pavilion in downtown San Jose since 1993. The six time division champions, who appear to be on their way to a seventh in the current 2011-2012 season, greet their adoring fans each game by skating through a gigantic shark head with a 17-foot open mouth and sinister flashing red eyes. Teal and black adorned fans doing “The Chomp” at the beginning of each Sharks power play to the Jaws theme will be rewarded for their dedication if the team scores in the final two minutes of the second period with two free tacos from Jack in the Box. Everyone should experience the thrill of the Shark Tank at least once by watching Captain Joe Thornton lead his Sharks to a victory with a few good checks into the boards and a punch or two along the way! http://sharks.nhl.com/index.html

After more than 15 years, professional hockey returns to San Francisco later this year. The San Francisco Bulls, the newest member of the ECHL “AA” hockey league, will play their first game at their new Cow Palace home in October 2012. The schedule has yet to be released, but season tickets are already available for purchase. The ECHL is the primary developmental league for the NHL. http://sfbulls.com