

WINTERFEST 2014

Area residents warm up to first-time event

BLADE STAFF

If Toledoans recall 2014 as being ushered in by a winter of discontent — frigid temperatures, record snowfall — they marked the year's departure in a more festive fashion. The sun shone more often, snowfall was negligible, and while the temperatures have certainly been nippy since the end of November, there's been no pesky polar vortex to drive people indoors.

Not yet, anyway.

Mother Nature has decided to play nice for a while, and everyone from sports teams to cultural institutions has taken advantage of the lull with Winterfest 2014, a 10-day convergence of events designed to show that the right amount of ice can be rather nice.

An outdoor hockey arena was constructed at Fifth Third Field in early December, playing host not just to the Walleye, but allowing high schoolers to square off between the nets, and even inviting old-timers and pee wee players to lace up their skates.

When the boys weren't battling between the lines, the rest of us got our shot during a series of free skates at the rink. On some nights, the assembly of age groups and ability levels was downright Nordic. If only for an hour or two, we got the chance to glide through life.

The nearby Huntington Center hosted Winter Fanfest for two days, bringing in the coveted Stanley Cup trophy for people to get their pictures taken with as part of a Hockey Hall of Fame exhibit.

At the Toledo Museum of Art, snow sculptors practiced their craft, teasing fabulous creations from blocks of snow, while animatronic dinosaurs at Imagination Station downtown and Lights Before Christmas at the Toledo Zoo showed that Winterfest could roar and glow.

Three years in the making, Winterfest was expected to draw more than 100,000 by the time it ends today, and have an economic impact in excess of \$2 million. Sometimes being out in the cold isn't such a bad thing.

— MIKE PEARSON



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

The Walleye play the Kalamazoo Wings on the outdoor rink built at Fifth Third Field for Winterfest.



THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

Under the watchful eye of his grandfather, Larry Rodriguez of Deshler, Ohio, right, Ethan James, 6, putts at the Toledo Museum of Art's display.



THE BLADE/LORI KING

Sylvania Squirt All-Stars coach Bob Rose and his son Lucian Rose, 9, look for Mario Lemieux's name on the Stanley Cup.



THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

Greg Butowski of Sunbury, Ohio, works on his second snow sculpture after the first one, an impala, melted.



THE BLADE/LORI KING

Tim Pedro, center, tries to keep his balance during Winterfest's open skate at Fifth Third Field.



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

The band In Theory performs before the Walleye play Kalamazoo.



THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

Elijah Yoder, 12, left, and Christopher Mars celebrate Christopher's goal during a sled hockey match.



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

Tom Gilson, left, of Toledo and Char Patterson of Defiance cheer on the Walleye.



THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH

Walleye Alden Hirschfeld (23) moves the puck against Kalamazoo's Sam Ftorek (8) during the second period of the first outdoor hockey game in ECHL history.