

Seniors take to the ice for exercise — and friendship

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Carrie Beavington and George Rudolph met years ago while skating and have been friends ever since. Photo Dan Toulgoet

More and more seniors are lacing up and circling Vancouver's rinks.

While some are rekindling their love of childhood skating, others are gliding in from their ice hockey days and still more are revisiting the sport after a few decades off the ice — testament to the old adage, it's never too late. The park board's Older Adult Skate program is testament to that.

It's 10 a.m. at the Kitsilano rink on a Wednesday morning in January and every skater is smiling as they circle the ice. Over the loudspeaker, the Animals' "House of the Rising Sun" provides background music, but some choose to ignore the song and plug in their iPhones — one fellow is listening to his Walkman. They're in the zone.

Carrie Beavington, age 67, learned how to skate at Trout Lake rink more than 40 years ago. She later met a few guys at "Couples Skating" at Kerrisdale rink and then went on a few dates.

"One guy glided over to me and asked if I would like to skate, but I told him that I was already skating," she says, laughing. "Well that floored him. We skated together and ended up dating for a few months."

Unlike other sports such as skiing, when you're by yourself on the ice it's easy to make friends. Many of these skaters take part for the camaraderie alone. Beavington often skates with her friend George Rudolph, 73.

"We inspire each other to skate the full 90 minutes and we reverse skate [the opposite direction] for the last 30 minutes."

Rudolph, who used to play old timers hockey, says it's easy to meet people both lacing up and on the ice.

"I met Carrie on the rink and we get together for birthdays and other events," he says. "You can skate every day at Vancouver's community centres and it's a great way to meet all kinds of people, share life experiences and travel stories. Some of us get together for \$10 lunches at the community centres. We chat and talk about stuff."



Garth Patrick is a regular at the Older Adult Skate at Kitsilano Rink. Photo Dan Toulgoet

Debbie Gregg came back to the rink after a 30-year gap.

"When I was a kid we had family skating every Friday night in Coquitlam," she says, "until teen skating kicked in and that was a big deal."

Now in her early 60s, Gregg skates three times a week. She rekindled the sport a few years ago when a friend wanted to take up skating.

"I took my skates out of the box and brushed off the dust. When I first got on the ice it was nerve-wracking," says Gregg. "The fear of falling was first and foremost, but muscle memory clicks in and right away it was a calming experience. To this day I skate to clear my head."

Then there's the exercise component. Gregg says skating helps with balance and coordination and if you pick up speed it's a great lower body workout.

"Gliding is good and I think some of the guys get their

heart rate up," she adds.

Eighty-year-old Maury Shacker agrees.

"Skating is the easiest exercise I know," says Shacker, who started skating 14 years ago when he retired from teaching at BCIT. "I started out once a week and now I skate five times a week. It's almost like a job — it's also become a habit."

Shacker has a routine — Mondays at Kerrisdale, Tuesdays at Trout Lake and Wednesdays and Fridays at Kitsilano. Sometimes he skates at Robson Square.

"But it's smaller and more crowded and I worry that I might run over a kid," he says, laughing. "But it's fun because you get the illusion of going faster. And I see a few regulars there."

For a self-proclaimed "lazy guy," Shacker appears to be in good shape.

"Skating gives you a sense of freedom," he adds. "It's exhilarating, especially if you build up speed. It's cool to do your own thing."

You can pick up a skating schedule and inquire about lessons at any Vancouver Park Board community centre or check out the eight rinks offering "50 and Better Skate" at vancouver.ca.

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