

## **IFSA – Ithaca Figure Skating Association**

Ithaca Journal

by Olivia M. Hall

On a recent Sunday afternoon, The Rink in Lansing felt as cold as the frigid day outdoors. But some 100 brightly-clad children, interspersed with a few adults and a dozen instructors, paid no heed to the temperatures as they shuffled, glided, looped, zigzagged, and occasionally stumbled across the ice with varying levels of confidence.

The Ithaca Figure Skating Association's (IFSA) Learn to Skate class was in full swing.

Offered three times a year, these ten-session classes divide beginners into small groups to get them comfortable with moving on the ice and to introduce them to the basics of skating. Students who have caught the bug can continue on to individual lessons and summer camps in figure skating, hockey, and ice dancing.

“We have and encourage a huge range of skaters, from very basic recreational to a large competitive group,” said IFSA president Teresa VanOrman of Scipio Center in Cayuga County, whose 11-year-old daughter Hayden discovered her love for figure skating four years ago and now trains at least four days a week.

While most of the club's active skaters are children and adolescents, several adults also joined the Learn to Skate class.

“My son Joseph wanted to learn to skate this winter,” said Daniel Barbash of Ithaca. “It's too cold to stand around watching, so I started, too. It's a lot of fun, and they have good teachers here.”

One of these is Anna Goehner, a former member of the Ice Theatre of New York who teaches beginners through advanced students as an IFSA-affiliated instructor.

“Absolute beginners struggle with feeling comfortable on the ice, especially adults, who are quite a bit farther away from the ice than kids,” she explained. “But as you tighten with fear, you become less able to handle the slipperiness of the ice. You need to loosen up, do the opposite of what your instincts want you to do. So in the class we take it very slow.”

Step by—sometimes tentative—step, students learn such fundamentals as how to glide forward and backward, swizzle (move by pushing the feet outward and inward), snowplow to a stop, and fall safely.

As they progress through more Learn to Skate and later private lessons, skaters work their way through the Basic Skills Program designed by the US Figure Skating organization, of which IFSA is a member.

Along the way, they constantly improve the quality of their all-important “edges”—gliding on and shifting between the inside and outside edges of the skate’s blade—which provide the basis for innumerable variations of movements, spinning, and jumping.

“A large portion of jumping is psychological,” said Stacy Petri, a full-time figure skating and ice dance instructor. “Some kids love the feeling of defying gravity, some don’t. Obviously, safety comes first, so we use a harness at the beginning.”

The six basic jumps vary in their take-off and landing techniques. The toe loop, for example, considered to be of medium difficulty, requires the skater to begin with an inside edge forward, turn to a backward outside edge, transfer weight to the other foot, take off backwards, turn forward in the air, rotate, and land backwards on the foot she started with.

If that sounds complicated, try the Axel, which entails snapping one’s hips precisely at the highest point of the jump in order to have enough time to finish the technique’s extra half rotation.

Twice a year, skaters can perform the skills they have mastered before a panel of judges that the club brings in from out of town, and rise through eight levels ranging from “pre-preliminary” to “senior.” (Olympic athletes compete at the senior level.)

“It’s very similar to scouting,” VanOrman said. “Some kids really get into receiving badges and pins and moving up the levels.”

Once they decide to compete, skaters often invest significant amounts of time and money into their sport.

Ten-year-old Angeline Turczyn, for example, competes in ice dancing with fifteen-year-old Cole Yolman of Etna and travels in from the Utica area at least four days a week.

“You don’t have a choice,” said her mother Karen Turczyn, who also serves as IFSA’s vice president. “I have three rinks near my house, but we come here for the coaches.”

Recently, Yolman and Turczyn, who train with Stacy Petri and her husband Jeff, saw their hard work rewarded when they placed sixth in the juvenile ice dance category at nationals in Boston.

Other IFSA skaters have also done well at recent competitions.

“I will say, this year at the Empire State Games (in Lake Placid), almost all of our kids medaled,” Stacy Petri said. “They were above the pack. I’m very proud of them.”

Although IFSA skaters are in competition with each other and other clubs, the atmosphere at events is friendly.

“The kids are very supportive of each other,” Karen Turczyn explained. “Even when people are competing against each other, they’re cheering each other on.”

As Teresa VanOrman put it, “It’s a skating family.”

In the end, for many it’s not about winning or losing but about enjoying the sport and the perpetual learning process.

“I like mastering skating skills and moving on to new ones,” said Hayden VanOrman. “And skating makes me feel free.”

Anna Goehner agreed: “When I skate, I feel present; there’s a meditation, a freeness. In all the times I’ve skated, it’s the process of learning that’s given me the most, the repetition, the flow that starts to happen, it’s amazing. In fact, a lot of adults I teach say that this is therapy. They tell me, ‘I don’t think about my issues because I have to think about not falling, taking those steps. I have to be right here with my body.’”

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Members: 35

Founded: 2007 (previously the Cornell Figure Skating Club)

Mission: “The Ithaca Figure Skating Association, as a member club of [United States Figure Skating](#), is dedicated to promoting excellence in all aspects of figure skating. To this end we: Provide a safe environment in which each skater can achieve his/her goals. Provide an organizational structure to assist or lead in the coordination of all programs associated with figure skating. Offer instruction in all levels and aspects of figure skating.”

Online: [www.ithacafigureskating.com](http://www.ithacafigureskating.com)

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