On the heels of the 2014 Winter Olympics, we had a unique opportunity to introduce northern New Hampshire to the sport of curling. Having very limited knowledge about the sport, the task of starting a brand new curling program within a 7-week period was a daunting challenge. Nevertheless, we undertook the challenge, and within a short time period created an arena-run program that has become one of our most popular programs and significant sources of revenue for the facility.

Starting a curling program from the ground up can have significant financial implications, the cost of the equipment being the most formidable; the cost for a set of curling stones (1 set = 16 stones) can range from $4,000-6,000 dollars. To run a financially viable program, an arena would need to purchase a minimum of 4 sets of stones. At a cost of nearly $20,000, many arenas feel that this is an impractical, even unattainable program to run when seeing these initial start-up costs. Once we began our research, we found that there were many different options for starting a curling program which widened the possibilities. Some companies offer a lease-to-own option while other organizations like USA Curling have a stone rental program.

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The ability to choose different options made our decision much easier to start this program.

Having only watched curling on TV, we had no idea on the "what's and how's" of curling. How do you prep the ice? How do you teach beginning curlers? What is the best way to run an open house? We quickly found out that the sport of curling is a small, tight-knit community which is extremely eager to lend a helping hand. Initially we contacted USA Curling and they provided us with some much needed information. They also put us in touch with curling clubs within our area. One organization, The Mount Washington Valley Curling Club, which plays out of the Ham Arena in North Conway, NH was an invaluable resource to us in getting our curling program started. The ease of starting our program would not have been possible without their knowledge and support. They provided us with not only the information we needed but the VOLUNTEERS to help us get started. Their organization spent many days teaching us and our membership the finer points on the game of curling. A deep debt of gratitude is owed to all of those who participated.

After we offered our first open house for curling, the response to league play was overwhelming. In the spring of 2015, we ran our first 7-week session of league play and an astounding 32 teams participated, which far exceeded our expectations. We then offered a summer and fall session and of the 32 teams that participated in the spring, 24 had returned. Our biggest concern going into this spring season has been retaining players. This winter due to limited ice we were unable to offer any time for curling, essentially losing any momentum that we had created. We hope that the buzz over the past few weeks from past players is an indication that our next session will be as strong as the past.

At a time in the season when ice is difficult to sell, the sport of curling has been able to fill the void and produce a solid stream of revenue for our facility. A program that we felt was going to be very difficult to get off the ground was quite the opposite. With help from vendors, individuals and local organizations, we were able to take a brand new program and make it a cornerstone of our operation.