

# Remsen Arena: Home to Cold Ice and Warm Hearts

In addition to hosting Choate Rosemary Hall's girls and boys ice hockey programs, which have helped develop the skills of multiple Olympic athletes, including Hilary Knight, Remsen Arena is home to several deeply rooted community partnerships. For decades, the rink has quietly served a broader purpose: opening its doors to local organizations, families, and athletes who might otherwise have limited access to ice time.

## Gaylord Wolfpack Sled Hockey

Since 2023, Remsen Arena has been the home rink for the Gaylord Sports Association Wolfpack Sled Hockey Team, the only sled hockey team in Connecticut. The coed team includes about a dozen adult athletes with a wide range of diagnoses, including spinal cord injury, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, amputation, and multiple sclerosis. They compete in the Northeast Sled Hockey League from September through May.



The team is coached by Karen Smith, a Paralympic gold medal winning goalie whose own athletic career continued at the highest level after an MS diagnosis. The Gaylord Sports Association, which operates the program, is funded entirely through donations, grants, sponsorships, and fundraising.

Choate donates practice ice time to the team and has hosted league tournaments at Remsen Arena, bringing visiting teams and visitors to Wallingford. Choate hockey players also support the program through annual charity

games, helping raise both funds and awareness for adaptive athletics. For the athletes, a consistent and accessible home rink has been transformative. For the community, it has brought nationally competitive adaptive sport directly into town.

## Adaptive Skate with Social Sabby

Choate's Adaptive Swim partnership with Social Sabby expanded onto the ice this winter with the return of Adaptive Skate, a longstanding program that paused during the COVID years.

Social Sabby aims to increase autism spectrum disorder awareness, education, and understanding in the local community to foster an inclusive community. When people understand autism spectrum disorder, they can not only be more compassionate toward those with varying ability levels, but also become more aware of their capacity to help others. The adaptive skate program focuses on fostering confidence, skill development, and an authentic connection between participants and Choate student mentors.

This January, parents watched from the stands, many with tears in their eyes, as their children experienced the exhilara-

tion of skating, some for the very first time. The joy on each participant's face was unmistakable. For families, it was not just about learning a new skill. It was about belonging, courage, and being welcomed fully into a shared space. Choate looks forward to welcoming the group back next season.

## Wallingford Hawks Youth Hockey

Remsen Arena is also home to the Wallingford Hawks, one of the oldest youth hockey organizations in the United States and a program deeply woven into the town's history.

The Hawks were first organized in the winter of 1946 to 47 by Choate hockey coach William Pudvah Jr. '34 for faculty children, but the program quickly expanded to include families from across Wallingford. In 1961, the Wallingford Youth Hockey League formally launched with just 15 skaters and a \$200 budget.

Today, the organization serves over 250 participants, offering learn-to-skate programs, instructional clinics, in-house leagues, and travel teams. Choate significantly discounts ice time for the Hawks, helping keep participation costs manageable for local families and ensuring that Remsen Arena remains a viable home for youth hockey in Wallingford. The program's focus on character, teamwork, and work ethic has remained constant across generations.



## Park and Recreation Public Skating and Sheehan Alumni Games

Beyond organized programs, Choate also donates ice time each winter for Wallingford Parks and Recreation public skating sessions. These skates provide town residents of all ages with access to safe, indoor winter recreation.

While Sheehan High School hockey now plays with a cooperative team out of East Haven, Choate continues to host the Sheehan Alumni Game and the Lyman Hall v. Sheehan Alumni game each year, free of charge.