

SMOOTH SKATING

A hockey-themed fundraiser scores big for the Discovery Land Company Foundation.

LAUGHTER AND MUSIC rang into the warm night from the new clubhouse at Gozzer Ranch Golf & Lake Club last summer. Inside, beneath rafters hung with enormous Canadian and American flags, a frisson of excitement traveled through the room as the community's members and guests mingled with international ice hockey stars.

The stars, retired and active National Hockey League greats, had arrived with skates and hockey sticks in hand and charity in their hearts to benefit the Discovery Land Company Foundation and contribute money and love to one of its projects—the Children's Village, a residential foster care home and shelter for homeless youth in nearby Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Gozzer and hockey are a natural fit. The Discovery community is home to numerous current and former players, among them Hockey Hall of Fame legends Wayne “The Great One” Gretzky, the leading point scorer in NHL history, and two-time Olympian and Stanley Cup champion Brett Hull.

As Gozzer general manager Rob Corette tells it, those hockey connections inspired Discovery founder and CEO Mike Meldman and partner Steve Adelson to toss around the idea of a hockey-themed charity weekend at the property. Last spring they put a plan in motion, and with help from Russ Courtnall, a retired NHL star who is also a Gozzer member, the message went out to NHL players in the Gozzer community and beyond to join in a fundraiser on July 11 and 12. The players would also take part in a short exhibition game at Coeur d'Alene's newly built Frontier Ice Arena that would raise money for hockey scholarships for local youngsters.

Fans in the region were galvanized by the prospect of seeing their heroes play at a local rink. Tickets for the game sold out in 15 minutes, raising \$30,000 for the town's youth hockey.

A team of ice greats—the “NHL Legends”—pose for a photo during a fundraising game, part of a charity weekend in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, for the Discovery Land Company Foundation and the town's youth hockey.



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Gozzer's Hockey Night featured players' jerseys (above) as auction items and a sushi bar (right) for guests. Opposite: Foundation director Christy Nichols and son Hunter Meldman, who contributed sports equipment and toys to the Children's Village. The residents created a banner of thanks to the Foundation for funds that reopened the second shelter.



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That Friday evening, a contingent of Gozzer members joined the crowd of 600 who roared with adulation as Gretzky skated onto the ice with Courtnall and the others. The team—dubbed the NHL Legends—skated lightheartedly but still beat the Coeur d’Alene Lakers, a collection of current and former Spokane-area pro players, 6 to 5. Says Courtnall, “The excitement in the area was really, really cool.”

At the sparkling party the next evening, the Legends went on to win for the DLCF. They had donated dozens of autographed hockey sticks, jerseys, and other keepsakes to a huge silent auction that filled the clubhouse patio. Gozzer member Scotty Williams joined in with memorabilia from his basketball career as a Chicago Bull.

For the live auction, which highlighted luxurious stays at Discovery communities, there was a professional auctioneer. But visiting NHL veteran Kelly Chase, now a newscaster, stepped in and took up the gavel.

Egged on by Chase, members and guests opened their wallets wide. All together they raised \$300,000 for the DLCF to donate to the Children’s Village, enabling the charity to return to full capacity, filling a hole that

the recession had punched into the shelter’s budget.

The Children’s Village is one of several nonprofit programs for children that the DLCF supports near Discovery communities, concentrating on those offering housing, education, counseling, medical care, family services, and access to arts, sports, and service opportunities. That includes helping fatherless boys in Fort Worth, Texas, for example, and underwriting day care in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, for preschoolers who would otherwise be left alone while their mothers work.

The DLCF focuses on charities with low overhead and a record of accountability, subjecting each one to a piercing scrutiny. “I feel such a tremendous responsibility to be careful and invest these donations wisely in a way that’s really going to help the kids,” says director Christy Nichols.

In Coeur d’Alene, the Children’s Village has operated continuously since 1990, giving youngsters from infancy through adolescence a temporary home; medical, dental and vision care; mentoring; and enrichment activities. Kids live there an average of 120 days, but some stay on for three or

four years. Mothers may bring their infants before going to jail or checking into substance rehab. Children sometimes arrive in pajamas, carrying only a teddy bear.

The organization had been forced to cut its 24-bed capacity in half when funding from the state dried up in 2009. With the fundraiser’s proceeds and a matching amount in 2016 from DLCF, the nonprofit will once again be in full operation.

“This gift lets us focus on making our program better and stronger, rather than scrambling just to keep the doors open,” says Christina Hull, the development director at Children’s Village. Adds board member Tinka Schaffer, “We will be able to do what we do best, which is provide a safe home for children so they can feel stable and secure, and help them develop to their full potential.”

“These children didn’t choose all the adult messes they were born into,” says Nichols. “Their innocence and fear are the tragic circumstances that drive me to help and do as much as we can to help them achieve stability, joy, inspiration, and the ability to lead productive lives.”

—MARILYN LEWIS