



St. Olaf College celebrates a new campus arena after nearly 100 years of hockey // by EMILY ZAK

**BEFORE THE ST. OLAF ICE ARENA** opened this January, varsity college players arrived at practice looking like Mites. The NCAA Division III teams had been renting ice at Northfield, Minnesota’s only facility, about a mile away from the university. Space was tight.

“They didn’t have their own locker room, so the kids would get dressed half[way],” says Brandon Koontz, St. Olaf

Ice Arena manager. “You know, no skates on, carrying their helmet, their gloves and stick into the arena, but they’re fully dressed in some cases.”

On game days, players weighing as much as 220 pounds would pile into cramped locker rooms underneath the bleachers. The locker rooms were so small that home and visiting teams needed three rooms each. Sometimes there wouldn’t be enough ice time

available for both the men and women to practice there, so one would have to drive an hour to somewhere like the Twin Cities or Faribault to find ice.

Now, with the new facility, St. Olaf athletes have a space of their own. The college provides seven varsity programs with dedicated locker rooms, offering a clean place for those who play hockey, soccer and other sports to change and stash their gear.



**STUDENTS, FACULTY AND THE PUBLIC ALIKE HAVE EMBRACED THE FACILITY. ABOUT 9 IN 10 STUDENTS LIVE ON CAMPUS, AND THOSE WHO NEVER WOULD'VE SET FOOT IN THE NORTHFIELD ICE ARENA SAW THEIR FIRST GAME THIS YEAR.**

So many of their opponents skate in facilities that aren't their own. St. Olaf is now one of four schools in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference that have a dedicated ice arena.

"They have a home. That's the best way to say it," says Koontz. "They actually have a home, and that makes a huge difference for them."

### **St. Olaf Hockey Highlights**

Starting in the 1920-30s, the men's varsity hockey team skated on an outdoor rink on campus. There were no stands. There was no scoreboard, as far as Koontz knows. Then, the city built its arena as a tempo-

rary facility in 1975. St. Olaf began renting ice over there and replaced the old sheet with a dorm.

Student figure skaters didn't have their own club like they do today. They skated with the community skating club.

Years passed, and the not actually temporary Northfield Ice Arena remained the school's only local option for skating. That changed when the college transformed its old Skoglund Fieldhouse into the new St. Olaf Ice Arena. A trained eye can still spot traces of the original limestone facade in the walls by the entrance, locker room halls and Zamboni room.

The atmosphere is distinctly St. Olaf. The school crest is hard to miss walking through the front door, and its 804 stadium seats are decked out in black and gold. With low ceilings and 22 pounding speakers, the arena buzzes with contagious energy during games. The LED light system is programmed to flash and dance every time the Oles score. The arena even got a hold of an organ in time for the last series of the season. St. Olaf is famed for its music and arts programs, so students are gearing up for a whole season of playing the instrument.

"It's just kind of a cool, a neat little arena. And it's definitely built for college hockey," says Koontz. "When the building gets packed, it gets loud. It's one of the funnest places to be, I'll tell you that."

Students, faculty and the public alike have embraced the facility. About 9 in 10 students live on campus, and those who never would've set foot in the Northfield Ice Arena saw their first game this year. Student-athletes from non-ice sports flock to the stands.

The figure skating club is growing and just wrapped up its first ice show in mid-May. A curling club will officially start throwing stones next year.

Plus, so many locals are hungry to watch hockey. There's also a lot of alumni in town, and the youth and high school programs are becoming more popular. The city's public rink is seasonal, so watching junior or high school competitions in the offseason used to involve driving at least an hour in any direction. It definitely helps to have a year-round arena right in the community's own backyard.



RINK BREAKDOWN

←..... 34,160 SQUARE FEET .....→

**1**  
NHL-SIZE RINK  
200' x 85'

OPENED  
**2019**

RINK FLOOR  
**CONCRETE**

**SKATING/HOCKEY PROGRAMS:** College activity classes, intramural sports, club hockey and figure skating, curling, open skate and public events.



LIGHTING IN ARENA | **LED**

**TENANTS:** St. Olaf College men's and women's hockey teams, St. Olaf men's club hockey team, St. Olaf Figure Skating Club and RESA (the department that runs intramurals). St. Olaf Curling Club, various youth hockey teams and possibly the Northfield Skating Club will also use the facility next season.

SEATING CAPACITY

**954**

**The Top Line**

Koontz runs the facility with a special level of expertise. Before he became ice arena manager at St. Olaf, he spent 12 years at the National Sports Center in Blaine, a little more than an hour away. He started as a part-time ice resurfacers operator and ended up a full-time assistant campus operations manager. He worked his way through positions that had him dealing



St. Olaf hockey teams

**FUN FACT:**

"There's a rumor that [famed NFL coach and player] Vince Lombardi did part of their fall camp for the Green Bay Packers in that fieldhouse at one point in time."

-Brandon Koontz



Vince Lombardi

**SPECIAL FEATURES:**

→ State-of-the-art video broadcasting capabilities, historic limestone facades, dual compressors, an organ, computerized temperature control and press box.



**ICE RESURFACERS:**  
ELECTRIC-POWERED

LOCKER ROOMS

**9**

ICE TIME

**\$170-\$225/hour**



**REFRIGERATION SYSTEM:**  
Indirect Ammonia/Glycol

with soccer fields, an indoor stadium and some event setup, and running programming and then operations at the Schwan's Super Rink. He also built his knowledge getting U.S. Ice Rink Association training over the years.

Koontz was sitting in his boss' office when someone from St. Olaf called to ask about him. He probably would've never left the Super Rink if he didn't ace that interview. Yet Koontz says his experience so far was worth moving his family across town.

He likes the redundancy of the facility's dual compressor system. He's never had to run both at the same time, but he



→ St. Olaf students, faculty and the general public can use the new year-round arena, which holds just under 1,000 spectators.

brought up a slower compressor, which is 75 horsepower versus 100, as a backup. He likes that everything is computerized, so he can log in anywhere in the world and keep tabs on his dehumidification system, air temperature, dew-point humidity and more.

Plus, Koontz is never bored. He gets to work with great faculty and staff who are proud of what they did to get the arena where it was. Tuition checks didn't build the St. Olaf rink—fundraising did. More than 325 people gave \$4.83 million in support. The college spent \$1.5 million.

Besides two part-timers, most of his staff are students, many on work-study. He's a big fan of teaching them how to make ice and run a game and handle operations.

"They are definitely great kids who want to listen and learn," says Koontz. "They do a great job of making my life easy, so that part of things is always fun. It's fun teaching someone how to drive an ice resurfer." ❄️



financing powered by:  
**Geneva Capital** LLC



## Make the play...

with financing that's *right* for *your* rink.

GENEVA CAPITAL OFFERS SIMPLE FINANCE SOLUTIONS FOR:

- Ice Resurfacers
- Dasher Boards & Rink Equipment
- Scoreboards & Electronic Displays
- Training & Fitness Equipment
- ...and more!

MUNICIPALITIES,  
COMMERCIAL CUSTOMERS,  
AND START-UPS  
ARE ALL WELCOME!

READY TO GET STARTED? IT'S EASY!



[apply.gogc.com](https://apply.gogc.com)

*\*There is absolutely no cost or obligation to apply. All offers are subject to credit & equipment approval.*



financing questions?

**Troy Putnam**, Regional Sales Manager  
p (320) 759-3563 | [troy@gogc.com](mailto:troy@gogc.com)