



## The ice man of St. Jacobs



David Bebee/The Record  
Phil Martin takes a shot on goalie Glen Weber during a pick up game of hockey at an outdoor rink on MarHaven potato farm between Hawkesville and St. Jacobs. Stuart Martin, the farmer who owns the property built boards and floods the shinny rink every winter.



Peter Lee, Record staff  
Phil Martin takes a shot on goalie Glen Weber during a pick up game of hockey at an outdoor rink on MarHaven potato farm between Hawkesville and St. Jacobs. Stuart Martin, the farmer who owns the property built boards and floods the shinny rink every winter.

## Potato farmer puts land behind his barn to good use in winter -- making perfect ice for pickup hockey

**APRIL ROBINSON**  
RECORD STAFF

ST. JACOBS

Everyone's usually tucked quietly into bed when Stuart Martin climbs on his tractor to flood the skating rink behind the barn.

You can make better ice at night, when it's really cold, he says.

And on busy Saturdays and weeknights during the holidays, it's often midnight before church groups or neighbourhood kids who use the rink for pickup hockey games go home.

Martin has maintained the big rink at his potato farm on Hawkesville Road for 15 years, and it's become a fixture in the community.

"It's been a winter tradition for us ever since the children had skates on," said Martin, 52.

It all started with a little rink on the front lawn 25 years ago.

"Then, as the kids grew, the ice grew."

The rink moved behind the barn and now measures 26 by 56 metres. Martin built boards along its perimeter, and floodlights illuminate the rink at night.

His five children now range in age from 17 to 28, some with children of their own. But the ice-making continues. "It's a lot of work," he said, smiling. "I'm not sure why I keep doing it."

There's an art to making a sheet of shiny, slick ice, he says.

It starts with a layer of packed snow, then several layers of water. He uses a machine -- like a miniature Zamboni -- which hooks on the back of his tractor to flood and scrape the ice.

If you flood with too much water, and it's too mild, you'll get "shell ice," he said. It will crack and chip. Instead, Martin patiently adds layer by layer until a smooth sheet is ready for eager skaters.

The boys who stopped by for a hockey game in Saturday's sunshine said the ice was "perfect," he said.

Sometimes, Martin will lace on a pair of skates himself. "Just till I run out of wind," he said. "I like to watch a good game out there."

Most church groups or neighbourhood kids will chip in a few dollars to the donation bucket at the rink. The money helps cover the electricity and water costs.

Martin's wife, Fern, takes bookings, but often kids will just drop by, popping their head in the house to say hello. Meanwhile, Martin keeps selling potatoes and tending to his dairy heifers year-round.

But he always finds time to take care of the ice.

"It's a service," he said. "To see the kids having fun is worth a lot."

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