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Published on YourSouthhills (<http://www.yoursouthhills.com>)

Czarny initiates youth hockey program in B-W

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Created Apr 19 2007 - 12:00am

At 5 years old, youngsters learn to read, to write and to play hockey.

Or at least the youth in the Baldwin-Whitehall area do.

The Baldwin Developmental Hockey Program, a first-year organization, aims to provide an arena for youngsters to learn and play hockey.

"I think a lot of kids don't know how to get involved in hockey," says Steve Czarny, the program's coordinator.

Given the recent success of the Pittsburgh Penguins, Czarny believes there is growing interest in hockey in the area. He hopes area youth will try the program and cultivate an appreciation for the sport.

At the very least, an introduction to hockey can provide an alternative winter activity for youngsters.

The developmental program is an offshoot of the Baldwin Hockey Club, which consists of the Baldwin High School freshman, junior varsity and varsity hockey teams.

Practices for interested skaters -- boys or girls -- between the ages of 5-13 are held at the Ice Castle facility in Castle Shannon. There is a minimal fee to participate.

Czarny spearheaded the program's development and has been helped out by "assistants" such as Kevin Becker, Joe Schmidlin, Dave Koval and Terry Marynychak.

Hockey jerseys and T-shirts have been donated to the youngsters, and Czarny & Co. are hoping to get the Penguins involved next year.

At present, there are 31 participants: Paul Zmuda, Alex Knueven, Luke Dowker, Stefan Ayers, Cody Lemp, Tyler Yule, Ryan Doran, Kenny Dee, Brian Dee, John Antenucci, Dan Winter, Jacob Naylor, Joey Star, Paul Kneer, Nick Powell, Nicholas Antonio, Zach Winoski, Randy Dutko, Mark Kelley, Mike Reft, Daniel Figura, Dylan Hommel, Zach Chalmers, Caitlin Dee, Chris Bailey, Trevor Dutkiewicz, Dallas Becker, Kody Becker, Jeff Krieger, Jenna Sheridan and Hunter Early.

With the program, Czarny hopes to not only build a strong hockey base in the schools, but also to spread the interest in hockey in the community.

"I believe there's a lot more to hockey than just hockey. I really believe in the game and I love to see young kids playing the game," Czarny says. "It's a way to spend time with your kids."

Czarny's own son, Tom, a junior on the Baldwin varsity team in 2006-07, helps with the developmental program -- as do other Baldwin hockey players such as Matt Schmidlin, Jon Gibson, Ryan Abbott, Zach Christman and Vince Famiglietti.

The program is winding down its current session, with three more weekend practices on tap at Ice Castle.

Developmental skating will continue in the 2007-08 fall/winter season, with possible exhibition games in the works against opponents from other youth programs, such as Peters Township and Canon-McMillan.

Plans to expand the program in the future are in the works, with the hope of making it a staple in the Baldwin hockey world.

For more information on the Baldwin developmental program, contact Steve Czarny at 412-835-4023.

Tryouts for Baldwin's varsity, junior varsity and freshman hockey teams are slated to take place June 3-4, from 6-9 p.m., at Ice Castle.

Registration for the tryouts will be held on Sunday, May 6, from 1-4 p.m., at the same location.

Any questions regarding the hockey tryouts can be directed to Bob Abbott at 412-881-6769.

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