

Sled Hockey Retrofit

Photos & story by
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In early Fall 2011, Eric Guzdek, the general manager of Northtown Center in Amherst, N.Y., was approached by Norm Page, Sled Hockey director at USA Hockey, to see if he had any interest in hosting a three-game exhibition series Feb. 23-25, 2012, between the USA Hockey and Hockey Canada national men's sled hockey teams.

Guzdek became a big fan of sled hockey after hosting the 2009 USA Hockey Sled Hockey Festival at Northtown Center (formerly Pepsi Center) at Amherst, so he jumped at the opportunity to host another event.

"I believe that hosting this series will bring more awareness to the sport of sled hockey, and will generate support and growth of the sport in our community," Guzdek says. "I told Norm that if we were going to do it, we would do it right. I wanted to make sure that these world-class players would have everything they needed when they arrived."

Guzdek contacted Sean Passingham and Stacey Overgaard at Rink Systems of Albert Lea, Minn. to determine the logistics and cost of retrofitting the players' boxes and penalty boxes to be sled accessible in one of the four rinks at Northtown Center.

Once Guzdek had a firm cost and installation time estimate from Rink Systems, he went back to Page to see if he knew of any local or national organizations that might be willing to donate some funds for the retrofit project. Page got in touch with the MassMutual Buffalo Agency and pitched the idea. To his delight, MassMutual provided a very generous grant to the Buffalo Sled Hockey association that was then given to Northtown Center to cover the entire cost of the project.

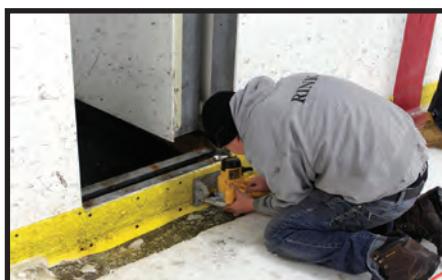
MassMutual and our Buffalo Agency



Players boxes before work started.



Floor riser platforms and benches removed.



Work starts on cutting out player gate thresholds.



Installation of new shorter threshold framework and facing.



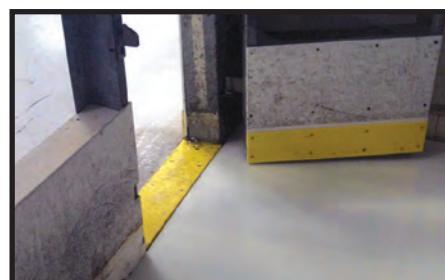
Installation of new gate lower extension.



Upper portion of dasher board facing removed.



Installation of Polycarbonate.



Synthetic ice installed on floor of players' box.

have a long track record of giving back to the community," says Joe Dileo, a general agent at MassMutual in Buffalo. "We have continuously worked to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and other special needs and their families. We feel that this grant will provide

more opportunities for disabled athletes and give Northtown Center the ability to attract future events."

The series of pictures on this page shows the two-and-a-half day retrofit process for two players' and penalty boxes from start to finish. ★