

## Let's Talk "ICE" – Part 1

**By: Karen Ferguson, Town of Kirkwood Historian**

With the temps dropping and the snow falling, it won't be long until the rivers and the ponds in our area are frozen. A favorite activity for many folks includes ice skating. Did you know that "Benny's pond" was the place to ice skate locally several years, if not decades, ago?

Benny's Pond is named after Elta Benjamin. He lived in the old Berkalew house on Main Street and owned much of the surrounding property, including the ponds that are located just under the train viaduct along Main Street.

Nancy Borruso remembers skating fondly. When she was a young girl in the 1940s, she and her friends could hardly wait for school to end. *(The school they attended was Schoolhouse #2 and is the home of the Kirkwood Historical Society and Museum).* They each would run home, grab their skates and meet back at Benny's Pond. She said the pond would be packed with school-aged children, especially those who lived along Main Street. Nancy had moved from an apartment on Main Street and lived in a house up on the hill close to where Cedarhurst School is now. She was used to walking everywhere she went so being a little further from Main Street didn't bother her one bit. She loved ice skating. Nancy recalled that they would build a bonfire there so that everyone could keep warm.

Bill Diffendorf, Jack Diffendorf and Marchie Diffendorf all shared stories about skating there too. *(Elta Benjamin was their grandfather.)* Bill's story was similar to Nancy's but he didn't start skating there until the 1950s. He said the pond was shoveled using equipment from the farm. Jack said it was a dune buggy and Marchie described it as similar to a tractor with a plow attachment. Bill said the bonfire was built in the middle of the pond and was fueled by tires. He said the bad part of using the tires was that skaters would trip on the metal chards left behind. Jack laughed and said that his grandfather didn't like them using the tires. Marchie and Jack said when they attended Schoolhouse #2 in the late 50s/early 60s that they actually would skate on the smaller, swamp pond behind the school during their lunch time. They also recalled their family, as well as the Hoover family, used to have a huge bucket about the size of a garbage can that was full of ice skates for people to borrow. Jack said whenever they would find skates for sale at garage sales they would buy them and add them to the bucket. Bill said the family and their friends still skate there. However, the ponds haven't frozen over like they used to in a long time. Jack thought the last time everyone was able to skate on the pond was in the 1970s.

As I sat listening to each person share a memory, there was one thing that struck me most and that was the twinkle in the eyes and the smiles on the faces as they recalled a fun pastime. If you remember skating on Benny's Pond and would like to share your story with me, please feel free to email me at [historian@townofkirkwood.org](mailto:historian@townofkirkwood.org)

*Let's Talk Ice – Part 2 will be published in January 2024 and will be about Ice Farming in our area.*