

# Canal Winter Ice Festival held next weekend

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HOLYOKE – Though winter may be a slushy slog, residents now have a reason to sharpen their ice skates, throw on some extra layers and trudge down to the first ever Holyoke Canal Walk Winter Ice Festival at Heritage State Park on Feb. 19.

The event is a joint effort by the City of Holyoke, Passport Holyoke and the Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts. The park, located along the Upper Canal, will be transformed into a winter playground, where kids and adults can glide across a frozen rink, build a snowman, make arts and crafts, sample food and enjoy live entertainment.

Kathy McKean, managing director MIFA/Victory Theater Project, said the ice festival is part of a series of planned events along the Canal Walk. The walk, which opened last year, runs between Dwight and Appleton streets. She said local art organizations are interested in hosting events on the Canal Walk and "building a brand" to showcase the venue.

The ice festival was to coincide with performances of 18th Century Russian operas that were to be performed in the City Hall Ballroom. Unfortunately, the opera company from Moscow was unable to resolve visa issues. The operas will be rescheduled for later in the year.

McKean the ice festival is a welcome respite from a brutal winter, which has kept many residents indoors. Staff from Heritage State Park are building a skating rink near a stretch by the Volleyball Hall of Fame. A circle of

snow mounds will contain the rink, where skaters can glide for free.

"With the amount of snow we've had, we're hoping that on the nineteenth, we will be able to provide a skating rink," she said. The Parks and Recreation Department is looking for donated ice skates that can be used by skaters that day.

The day will feature an eclectic range of activities and entertainment that includes "Rocco the Fire Juggler," and Artist Chris Nelson will create ice lanterns and ice sculptures. Children can meet the "River Otter," the festival's official mascot. A snowman-making contest is scheduled, too. "We're hoping that people really come and enjoy themselves," said McKean.

The festival is scheduled from 2 to 7 p.m. For more information, visit [www.mifafestival.org](http://www.mifafestival.org) or [www.passportholyoke.org](http://www.passportholyoke.org).