

THE COLUMBUS Telegram

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COOL ADDITION



JARED BARTON PHOTOS, COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Columbus Ice opens

JARED BARTON
Columbus Telegram

Many Columbus natives have memories of skating in Pawnee Park in the winter, but that was back when the park had a warming shelter for skating. Since that went away, ice skating hasn't been as prevalent.

The warming shelter came to mind when Elizabeth "Liz" Blaser was brainstorming for a 4-H Diamond Clover project in 2015, sort of like an Eagle Scout project for 4-H. She was at her mother, Amy Blaser's, office at Columbus Community Hospital, looking out the window, and saw people skating on Lake Esther.

"Just through conversation, (Amy) mentioned that people used to skate down at Pawnee Park, and how much fun that used to be, and it was a really core childhood memory for a lot of people," Liz said. "We kind of looked at each other, and our eyes got big, and we said, 'Ice skating, that'd be really cool to bring back to the community.'"

That was in 2015, when Liz was a sophomore at Scotus Central Catholic School. The project started with a donated baseball press box by Columbus High School, and a projected cost of around \$40,000, but suddenly blew up in popularity and scope, Liz said. It grew from renovating a smaller building to building a new one from the ground up.

The space had to be built a specific way so the ice would maintain some shape and not just melt and refreeze over winter.

Bryan Kearney of BD Construction, community advocate Hollie Olk and Chip Kay with Columbus Public Schools were huge helpers in making this happen, Liz said. In general, between the skaters and the many project sponsors, the community has kept things on track over the years.

"What's really awesome is, through it all, the community has just continued to really express their support of the

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A sign outside of the Columbus Ice skating area by Columbus High School lists rules, common courtesies and safety information for those who choose to skate there.

Bill to eliminate state teacher training requirement advances

JOSH REYES
Omaha World-Herald

LINCOLN — The Nebraska Legislature advanced a bill Tuesday to eliminate the human relations training requirement to become a teacher or substitute in the state.

State Sen. Dave Murman said the change will make it easier to become a teacher and help combat educator shortages in Nebraska.

The bill, which passed its first of three rounds of floor debate, did not hear any opposition at a public hearing last month. But on the floor, some lawmakers said they were concerned about removing a training meant to expand an educator's cultural competency.

Sen. Terrell McKinney of Omaha read the course's description in state law, which states the human relations training involves recognizing and dealing with biases like sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination both in behavior and teaching materials. It covers an awareness of the values, contributions and history of a diverse society. It helps instill a respect for human dignity and individual rights and an ability to relate with people of different backgrounds.

"Considering everything that's going on in the world, even looking at what's going on with (Immigrations and Customs Enforcement) and the human relations behind that and dealing with individuals from immigrant backgrounds, ... you should not get rid of human relations training because it's probably needed more than ever," McKinney said.

Murman did not take issue with the content of the course. He said the human relations training has a lot of overlap with the college coursework necessary to become a teacher, which includes learning about "individual and social responsibilities through the study of ethical principles and reasoning" and "interaction with diverse cultures and engagement with global issues."

Multiple lawmakers said they took the course or know people who did, though they had mixed opinions of it. Sen. Victor Rountree of Bellevue said he had plenty of human relations training in his career in the Air Force and as a civilian budget administrator at Offutt Air Force Base but needed more upon retiring and signing up to substitute teach.

"There was some very good dialogue," he said of the online training. "I realized as an older individual working with a lot of our younger people that there were some great gaps in culture."

Rountree said the human relations training was needed.

Sen. Jana Hughes of Seward said the course was not helpful for substitute teaching and that a course focused on classroom management and working with students at different ages would have been more helpful. She also said registering for the course and finding time for it within the prescribed timeframe was cumbersome.

Nebraska lawmakers want to make it easier to become a teacher or substitute

"I like this bill because it's eliminating a barrier to getting a sub in the classroom," she said.

The Legislature's Education Committee also held a hearing last month for David City Sen. Jared Storm's LB 893 to create an alternate training program for substitutes to offer more flexibility. He also said his goal is to address the educator shortage.

During debate of Murman's bill, some

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