

**Charles M. (Sparky) Schulz,  
The Redwood Empire Ice Arena/Snoopy's Home Ice,  
& Snoopy's Senior World Hockey Tournament**

*"Hockey, for me, is the greatest game going."* Charles M. (Sparky) Schulz

Charles M. Schulz may have been a famous artist, drawing and storytelling through thousands of Peanuts comic strips beloved world-wide, but a passion for ice hockey, developed as a child in snowy Minnesota winters, created an equally-loved ice arena and hockey tournament for other life-long hockey players like himself.

Schulz attended his first hockey game in St. Paul in the 1930s, and began playing on a small backyard rink his father built, or if the weather was uncooperative, on snow-covered streets where snow mounds serving as goals were often crushed by irreverent drivers. He coaxed his mother to make goalie pads out of gunnysacks with rolled-up newspaper sewn inside. His grandmother was his goalie.

"Our house had a typical Minnesota basement...The space beneath the stairs...made a pretty good facsimile of a hockey goal. Being very accommodating, my grandmother would take a broom ... and stand in front of the goal while I shot tennis balls at her with a hockey stick. I like to think she made a lot of great saves," Schulz once told.

As an adult and artist, hockey entered his work on paper. An early cartoon shows two boys playing hockey on a frozen birdbath. Later, in his regular cartoon strips he introduced Snoopy as the "World Famous Hockey Player" who would skate on birdbaths and ponds in the same fierce competition for which his creator was also known.

When Schulz's work took him to the ice-free warmth of Santa Rosa, California, his love of hockey traveled with him. His five children learned to skate at a small arena in town, and when that arena closed, his first wife, Joyce, convinced him to build what is now Snoopy's Home Ice, the Redwood Empire Ice Arena, which opened in 1969. From the start the arena offered youth hockey, show skating, lessons, shows and concerts. Schulz himself supported youth hockey by refereeing and officiating. The adult hockey program saw him playing weekly.

He continued to follow professional hockey in California, favoring the California Golden Seals and even designing their team mascot, a seal named "Sparky."

In 1973 Schulz's Santa Rosa Diamond Icers participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Senior Olympics Hockey Tournament in Burbank, California. The following year, the director of that Tournament asked Schulz if his arena in Santa Rosa could host the future tournaments. And so it began. The tournament has been played at the arena every July since 1975, with the exception of 2001, when the arena closed for a short time for equipment renovations. In 1982 the name was changed to Snoopy's Senior World Hockey Tournament.

Initially the Burbank tournaments had teams playing in one category, age 40 and over. When Schulz took over the 45+ and 50+ Divisions were added. Initially ten teams played in the tournament. As years progressed, more divisions were added, and in 1998, Snoopy's Senior World Hockey Tournament became the first tournament in North America to offer a 75 and over division – a division in which Schulz's own Diamond Icers played, with Schulz on the team until the year before his death in 2000 at 78.

Over the last 42 years teams have traveled from Finland, Japan, Austria, Australia, Norway and Sweden to play in the Tournament. In 2017, 13 teams traveled from Canada to play, a not unusual number. Teams from outside California numbered 31 in 2017.

One Diamond Icer who still attends regularly is the Guinness World Record's oldest ice hockey player Mark Sertich. In 2017 he celebrated his 96th birthday playing hockey in the Tournament. He plans to attend this year too.

"The tournament has been an incentive for me to keep playing hockey year-round to be in the best possible shape when July rolls around," Sertich says. "I'm sure that by having the Senior World Hockey Tournament, Sparky encouraged many players to continue to play that great game of hockey into later years..."

Roland Thibault, one of the coaches of the Diamond Icers, still attends the tournament, too, and lauds Schulz for putting on the Tournament: “We got to know hockey players from all over the world – people who loved hockey like we did, and who loved to play no matter how old they were.”

In 2002, Jeannie and Monte Schulz became the Tournament Sponsors to carry on Sparky’s tradition of gathering life-long hockey players to compete in their favorite sport and celebrate their hockey friendships and friendly competitions.

This year Snoopy’s Senior World Hockey Tournament will celebrate it’s 43rd year, with 73 teams registered to play and more than 100 games scheduled, from 6 a.m. to midnight, during the ten days of the Tournament.

Next year Snoopy’s Home Ice/Redwood Empire Ice Arena will celebrate 50 years of operation, as the only permanent ice arena between Oakland and the Oregon border on the coast of California. In addition to the Snoopy Senior World Hockey Tournament, Snoopy’s Home Ice is the host of the Santa Rosa Flyers youth hockey league team and the Santa Rosa Junior College Hockey Team, and Cardinal Newman (High School) Ice Hockey team. Snoopy’s Home Ice offers four divisions of Adult Hockey League play with ten games per week scheduled and every Tuesday night during Sparky’s old ice time many of his friends still play a pickup game every Tuesday night. Four additional sessions offer stick time and all ages pickup games.

Schulz himself was honored for his support and dedication to hockey at several levels over his lifetime.

In 1974, Schulz was presented with a silver hockey stick by the Northland Hockey Company for his contributions to hockey.

In 1981, he was awarded the Lester Patrick Trophy for outstanding service to hockey. The Lester Patrick Awards is presented annually after selection by a committee consisting of the President of the NHL, an NHL Governor, a representative of the New York Rangers, a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame Builder's section, a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame Player's section, a member of the U. S. Hockey Hall of Fame, a member of the NHL Broadcasters' Association and a member of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association.

In 1993, he was inducted into the United States Hockey Hall of Fame.

*“Playing hockey is one of the few things that takes my mind completely off of everything else in my life. You don’t have to think of anything else. That’s when I think sports have the biggest value...”* Charles M. Schulz

###