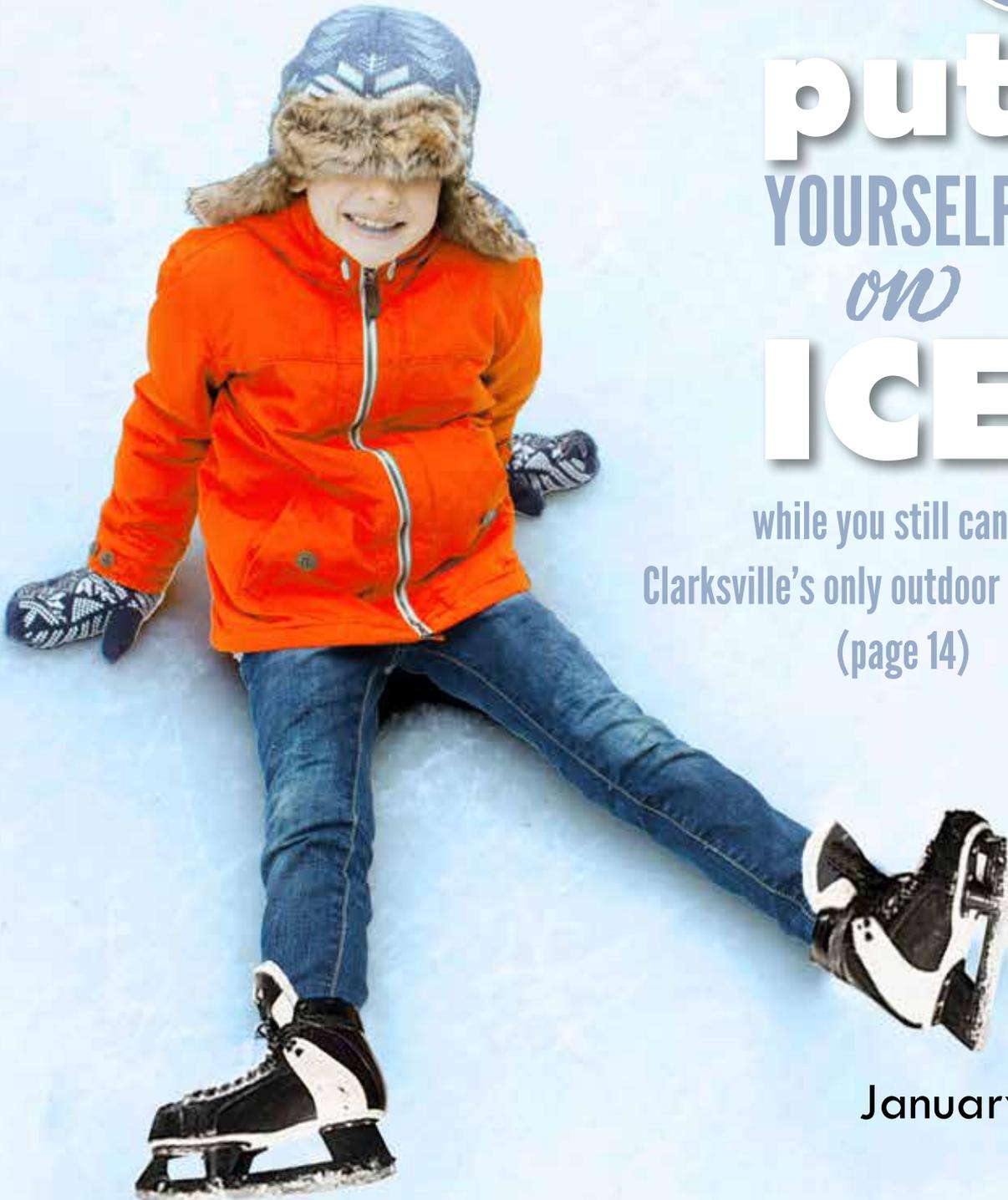


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January 2018



The New Downtown Commons

by Tony Centonze

"Imagine a summer concert series or a specialty event like a Moon Pie Festival or Grilled Cheese Festival," Norman Quirion said. "Or, just picture a great central gathering place, or that perfect spot to host a birthday party. That's just the tip of the iceberg of what can be done at Clarksville's Downtown Commons."

Quirion, along with Paula Atkins and Deanna McLaughlin sat down recently to talk about the endless possibilities for the new park that is still under construction in the heart of downtown. They could barely contain their enthusiasm.

Quirion is the Executive Director of Two Rivers Company which manages and operates the park now known as Downtown Commons. TRC still oversees its normal responsibilities in the district working daily to bring new business to downtown.

"The park was originally a TRC conception, but a lot of people have been involved in the planning to get us to this point," Quirion said. "The ice rink idea came from the County Mayor's office, and Paula was brought on to oversee events and activities at the park."

The TRC team has some big ideas for its own

events, but also sees great potential for the space being used for individual and corporate events, summer camps, even weddings.

TRC's first big surprise for the citizens of Clarksville was the city's first outdoor ice rink, which opened the day after Thanksgiving to big crowds, and lots of community support.

"The ice rink is seasonal," Quirion said. "It will be leaving us on January 31, but we're definitely bringing it back next year. For most of the year, that will just be an open space that can be used for events, large and small, or as just a great spot to sit, have lunch and enjoy the free Wi-Fi.

"Some events at the park will be ticketed and therefore it will be fenced off. Others will be free and people will be able to move in and around the park without much restriction. There will also be events that require us to close the streets at times. We will be working closely with the city and its agencies to make Downtown Commons safe and successful."

A lot of questions cannot yet be answered. The park is on track to be finished around March of 2018, but no firm date has been announced. How many people the park can handle, how it will extend into

the streets and sidewalks of the city for larger events, how roads might be closed to maximize potential, Quirion and his team are still working out those details.

“We have some big opportunities here,” Quirion said. “We hope to tag on to events like Riverfest, and the annual Christmas Parade. And, we are looking at continuing some great events, like Jammin' in the Alley. We also hope to bring back some of the great events that have left us, like Rivers & Spires, and

Oktoberfest. This would also be the perfect place to host a Brewfest or Wine fest.”

Most striking about the TRC team is their open-minded approach to the park's use. Quirion insists that they are looking at all ideas, and are eager for input from the community.

The ice rink opened November 24, and has averaged 250 skaters a day, 7 days a week. This interview was conducted prior to CMC Schools' winter break. The team was confident that those numbers would go up once winter break began.

“I think people will be on the property seven days a week,” Quirion said. “As for major events, we want to do something on a weekly or biweekly basis, but we want to do the proper planning and organizing to make sure these events are done right. That's the most important thing.”

The TRC team is hoping that APSU students will start using the space during the day. Ideally,

students would grab something to eat at one of Clarksville's downtown eateries, then enjoy their food in the park.

“We don't want to take away from any of the downtown businesses,” Quirion said. “We want to be a draw that attracts more people downtown to support those businesses. We will definitely consider that in the timing of all our events. We don't want to compete with Clarksville's downtown merchants and restaurants.”

Atkins says she is getting calls from groups in Hopkinsville, Murray,

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even Goodlettsville, that want to visit the ice rink. She sees that as a positive indicator for the park's potential to be an important piece of the downtown revitalization puzzle.

"This park, done right, will hopefully spur much more

development in our downtown," Quirion said. "When the big restaurant chains and retail shops look at opening a location, they look at foot-traffic. People on the ground will create new opportunities for us. I think we are on the cusp of

attracting some bigger names to the area. This is the type of project that takes us in that direction. This formula has been proven.

"Also, the barrier between APSU's campus and downtown has now been broken, with some of the recent property transfers, like the Jenkins & Wynne deal. We now have a Barnes & Noble coming to the corner of 4th and College Street. We are really excited about creating a gateway to downtown for the 11,800 APSU students."

Quirion talked about bringing in some big name entertainment, saying "We have some real possibilities in the works."

"We have so many people involved in the success of this park," Quirion said. "Our city and county leaders have done a lot to make this happen. TRC did its part, but local leadership brought it the rest of the way.

"We've had some naysayers on this project, but like many things, people are against the idea at first, but once it's there, they enjoy it just like everyone else. This park is not everyone's vision. But I think the first time they come here to see their kid or grandchild perform in a choir or something of that nature, they will see what this space is about."

Atkins and the team talked about the excitement they have seen, not just from the kids, but from parents and grandparents as well.

"When you're here at night,



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and you see these kids playing and enjoying the ice, you'll become a fan pretty quick," Atkins said. "This is a multi-generational thing. We're seeing kids, parents, grandparents, college students, couples. People of all ages are so excited to have something new to do in this town, something they have never done before. We just want people to come and see it for themselves. I'm happy when I walk away from here every night, after watching these families have so much fun. And, this is just the start."

One of the things that gets the TRC staff so excited is the number of people who are contributing to the park's development.

"There is so much experience represented within the different groups that are working on this project," Quirion said. "We have so many great resources and so much knowledge to tap into. It's amazing, to see the concern and excitement about what can happen downtown.

"We are open to so many great possibilities for this park. If anyone has ideas or suggestions that will make this Downtown Commons great, please reach out and let us know. That's what we're here for. This is going to be everybody's park. What is good for Clarksville, is good for Montgomery County.

For more information about Downtown Commons or TRC, go to their website www.tworiverscompany.com, or call (931) 245-3700.



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