

# Celebrate Winter at the 2018 Saranac Lake Winter Carnival

SARANAC LAKE – Visitors from around the world will travel to New York's Adirondack Mountains from February 2-11, 2018 to celebrate the annual Saranac Lake Winter Carnival with an 'Adirondack Festival' theme.

The Saranac Lake Winter Carnival is the longest-running event of its kind in the eastern U.S. dating to 1897. The Carnival began as a one-day event to break the monotony of the long Adirondack winter and has grown into a 10-day festival that includes an Ice Palace, sports, performances, two parades and three sets of spectacular fireworks.

Over the years, the Winter Carnival has retained the warmth, charm and camaraderie of a community celebration. The Carnival is organized by an all-volunteer group called the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival Committee, or more formally, the Society for Promotion of Winter Carnival, Saranac Lake, Inc. It is a community-driven festival made possible by the efforts of many volunteers and sponsors.

One of the longest-running traditions at the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival is the Winter Carnival button. The buttons are collected by residents and visitors every year, especially since "Doonesbury" creator and Saranac Lake native Garry Trudeau began designing the buttons in 1981. They can be purchased at various locations around Saranac Lake or by mail order. In 2012, Trudeau also began designing collectible posters as a fundraiser for the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival Committee.

Each year the community chooses a theme for the Winter Carnival and the celebration begins with the coronation of the King and Queen on the first Friday night of the 10-day festival. The royal couple is a team of two local citizens who have been chosen for their substantial contributions to the well-being of the Saranac Lake community through their volunteer work. Joining the King and Queen are a Prince and Princess (elected at the two local colleges, Paul Smith's College and North Country Community College) and a Royal Court (elected at the Saranac Lake High School). Completing the Carnival royalty are six Pages (selected at the local elementary schools), a Chamberlain and an Archbishop, who tend to such things as proclamations and the crowning of the royal couple. The first official duty of the newly crowned "royals" is to mingle with the "common folk" at a Royalty Reception following the coronation.

Sporting activities pack the schedule of events at the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival. Traditional winter sports include snowshoe and Nordic ski racing, inner tube and alpine ski races, skating races and hockey games. There is also a series of non-traditional winter sports such as Snowflake Volleyball, Snowshoe Softball, Ultimate Frisbee Games, Snow Rugby, Firemen's Broomball, a curling exhibition and an exhibition of woodsmen's logging skills with Paul Smith's College students. And there are some events unique to Winter Carnival such as the Ladies Fry Pan Toss, Arctic Golf and the Ice Palace Fun Run.

A number of cultural activities are also part of the schedule, including concerts, theatrical performances, indoor and outdoor movie nights, and the annual Rotary Club Variety Show.

The centerpiece of the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival is the Ice Palace, built on the shore of Lake Flower's Pontiac Bay at the state boat launch. The Ice Palace was an outgrowth of the village's

ice industry, which, in the days before electric refrigerators, harvested ice from local lakes for use in ice boxes across the country and around the world. Despite some refinements in machinery, the Ice Palace is still constructed in much the same manner as it was in 1898, the first year it was built. Once the ice reaches a suitable thickness, about 14 inches, the ice is partially cut using a saw that was designed and built locally in 1939 for the harvesting of refrigeration ice on Lower Saranac Lake. It is essentially a huge circular saw blade mounted on a sled and driven by a gasoline engine. The saw can cut to a depth of approximately 11 inches. Since the ice often reaches depths in excess of 20 inches, the cutting process must be completed with large hand saws that are relics of the traditional ice harvesting process. The blocks taken from the lake are 2 feet wide and 4 feet long, are anywhere from 1-2 feet thick, and accordingly will weigh between 400 and 800 pounds. Once on shore, the blocks are hoisted onto the structure and then cemented to one another with a "mortar" made of slush. A small palace requires about 1,000 blocks while a large one requires 3,000 or more. Within each palace is an array of colored lights that transform it into a vivid sculpture of ice and light every evening.

While early palaces were constructed by private contractors, currently they are built by community volunteers known informally as the Ice Palace Workers (IPW) Local 101.

### Beginnings

The Saranac Lake Winter Carnival began as an integral part of Saranac Lake's history as a renowned health resort. Back in the late 1800s, the village was a thriving logging community nestled deep in the Adirondack wilderness. Its pristine setting provided healing and rejuvenation for hundreds of tuberculosis sufferers, particularly at the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, founded by Garry Trudeau's great-grandfather, Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau. In the course of "taking the cure" here, many patients experienced a renewed passion for life, and took every opportunity – in every season – to explore the natural beauty that surrounded them. The long, cold Adirondack winters with snow-covered mountains and ice-encrusted lakes provided the opportunity to enjoy outdoor recreational activities such as skiing, sledding and skating.

In order to break winter's chill and to promote outdoor sports and games, the Pontiac Club was formed in November 1896, and a few months later, they sponsored a one-day fancy dress winter carnival in 1897, which was expanded into the Pontiac Club Carnival in 1898. The Winter Carnival has not been held every year. After a few years, it was held every other year. And there were huge chunks of years in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s when it was not held. However, it was resurrected in the winter of 1947-48 and has been held annually since that time. The Ice Palace, which had not been built since 1920, made a comeback in 1954.

For more information, including the latest schedule of events, visit the Saranac Lake Winter Carnival website at [www.saranaclakewintercarnival.com](http://www.saranaclakewintercarnival.com).