

Hockey is for everyone



Plymouth South student Jonathan Nearman controls the puck during a recent special hockey tournament contest. [COURTESY PHOTO]

The Great Blizz special hockey program coming to The Bog

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KINGSTON – His dad believes Jonathan Nearman could run for mayor of Plymouth and win.

“He’s such a social kid. He loves being around people and having fun. Jonathan’s also crazy about anything to do with planes,” Steve Nearman said about his 19-year-old son, who is autistic. Jonathan attends Plymouth South and is a member of the school’s Unified Track and Field squad. But his real love is playing hockey and with any luck he’ll be playing a lot of hockey in the very

near future.

Steve Nearman and Scituate resident Eric McCroskey are the driving forces behind The Great Blizzards of Massachusetts, a new special hockey team that will play out of The Bog in Kingston. A member of the American Special Hockey Association, The Great Blizz is a program designed for people of any age or gender with cognitive, developmental or intellectual disabilities who want to play hockey.

An open house to introduce the program to the community will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 27, at The Bog. At that time people can learn more about the program and meet the people behind it. Additional open house

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sessions are set for the same time May 18 and June 22 at the hockey rink.

"We hope to get the program going in September and run it through March. If we get a good response we'd like to even lengthen the playing season to May" to coincide with the school year, Nearman explained. Practice

sessions are held from 7 to 7:50 a.m. each Saturday at The Bog with games and some travel for tournaments also on the wish list.

A registration fee is required to play, but all hockey equipment will be donated free of charge by the ASHA.

Jonathan and McCroskey's son, Nathan, played with the ASHA's Nova Cool Cats when both families lived in Northern Virginia. The program shared ice space with the NHL's Washington

Capitals and every once in a while Jonathan had a pretty talented linemate during practice - hockey superstar Alexander Ovechkin.

"The Capitals organization, Ovie in particular, was incredible to our players. He'd come over and skate with us a little bit," Nearman said. "I'd love to set up a similar type of a relationship with the Boston Bruins once we get up and running."

When Nearman moved his family to Plymouth he found only eight ASHA teams in New

England and just two in Massachusetts: the Boston Bear Cubs out of Canton and the Hopkinton-based East Coast Jumbos.

After too many hour-long drives back and forth to Canton, Nearman decided it was time to create something closer to home. Thus was born The Great Blizzards of Massachusetts.

"The Bog loved the idea of hosting this program. They couldn't do enough things to help us get this off the ground," Nearman said. "We think this can really be great

resource for people, especially families in the Southeastern Mass. and Cape Cod area" that have never had a program like this close to their home.

Volunteers are needed to help coach and mentor the players and to work the bench area during practices to see that everyone is enjoying themselves.

The group is starting to establish a presence on social media.

A website is in the works, but for more information on the ASHA head over to [www.](http://www.americanspecialhockey.org)

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On Twitter and Instagram they can be found @thegreatblizz and they have a Facebook page at The Great Blizzards of Massachusetts Special Hockey Inc.

For more information on the program you can call Nearman at 508-202-0218 or email him at thegreatblizz@yahoo.com.

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