

# THE GREAT BLIZZARDS OF MASSACHUSETTS

By Emily Goodman-Simeone



## NO HOCKEY PLAYER LEFT BEHIND

Every Saturday morning from September to May, a special team of players tear up the ice at The BOG in Kingston, eager to learn the game of ice hockey from their volunteer coaching staff. At the helm is the organization's founder and Pinehills resident Steve Nearms. Alongside his talented coaching staff, he works and mentors players ages 5+, all of whom have an intellectual, developmental, or physical disability.

"We are more than a hockey program," explains Steve, as he enthusiastically describes the important work of his nonprofit, which was inspired by his own son. "We do teach players how to skate. We teach them the game of hockey. But we are really teaching them life skills: how to follow instructions, how to work together, and be good sports. Hockey is a game of quick decisions — you have to make fast choices. Decision-making is another important skill that we teach our players."

Prior to moving to Pinehills in 2017, Steve's family lived in Virginia, and his son, who has autism, ADHD, and processing delays, played on the NOVA Cool Cats, a special hockey team in the area.

As fate would have it, another family from the NOVA Cool Cats moved to Scituate during the same time



frame, and both sons began to play for a special team in Canton, MA. Realizing that they could start their own special team closer to home, The Great Blizzards






Special Hockey Program officially began in September of 2019 and currently has 30 rostered players.



Now age 22, Steve's son (whose jersey is also #22) is the team's goaltender. "This is the best way to ensure we always have a goalie for our games," laughs Steve. "And, boy, does he love to smack talk!" The team really enjoys traveling for tournaments, staying in hotels, and eating in restaurants together. Despite COVID restrictions, the team has played special teams in Waltham and in New Jersey. Their next stop is Albany, NY.

A financial advisor by day, Steve's commitment and ideas have accelerated the growth of the program year over year. "Life is kind of like water — it has its own path. There was a need for the program, and here we are," he says.

The Great Blizzards have a special relationship with the Boston Bruins. The Bruins alumni team has supported The Great Blizzards' yearly fundraisers by participating in community games! Imagine skating on the rink with former Bruins players! These fundraisers support the program, which asks families for a nominal, seasonal fee, all of which goes directly to the players.

You can watch previous games at [www.bostonbruinsalumni.com](http://www.bostonbruinsalumni.com). If you'd like to support The Great Blizzards, you can do so on their website: [thegreatblizz.org](http://thegreatblizz.org). 



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