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# An "ice" way to work



PHOTOS: PHILADELPHIA SYMMETRY

Philadelphia Symmetry and Liberty Figure Skating merged in 2014. Now, the combined clubs are coming to Bucks County with exhibitions and free classes at Bucks County Ice Sports Center in Warminster.

## ► Two organizations team up to bring synchronized skating to Bucks County

By Jack Firneno  
The Times

Ashleigh Renard has some very kind words for her colleague Kati Link.

"I believe she has the best learn-to-skate program I've ever seen," she said unequivocally.

It's a ringing endorsement, especially given Renard's own background. Originally from Canada, she's been team skating since the age of 8, and has been coaching and directing teams since she was a teenager.

Later, she competed as a synchronized skater in the Canadian National Championships and earned a bachelor's degree in Exercise and Sports Science.

Since coming to the U.S. after college, Renard coaches full-time while volunteering

for the U.S. Figure Skating and Professional Skaters Association.

She founded Philadelphia Symmetry, a multi-team synchronized skating club, more than a decade ago in the Wissnickon section of Philadelphia.

It was the first synchronized skating team in the region, and has grown steadily in terms of membership and prestige.

Now, having merged with Link's Hatfield-based Liberty Figure Skating in 2014, the duo is able to expand into Bucks County.

"We can't believe we ever worked separately before," said Renard.

The advantage to their partnership is something of a numbers game — or lack thereof.

It can be challenging to recruit skaters for a sport that most people don't know about. "Unless you catch an hour of the championships on the Lifetime Network," laughed Renard.

Many times, Link would train young skaters

but they'd eventually move to Renard's teams. Philadelphia Symmetry, meanwhile, would lose skaters to larger organizations.

Working together, Link and Renard can attract skaters as young as 6 years old and create a fun, productive environment that keeps people on the teams.

That effort, especially, has been bringing them to Bucks County Ice Sports Center in Warminster. They've held exhibitions and free introductory skating classes this year, and will hold a few more sessions in early 2017.

The idea is to show kids — and their parents — just how much fun they can have with synchronized skating.

Renard and Link, along with the rest of their team, give many kids their first skating lessons and even a chance to try out their first synchronized routine.

Parents are often amazed at how well even young children can learn to skate together.

Please see **SKATING** / Page 12

November 23, 2016

## SKATING

► From Page 10



PHOTOS: PHILADELPHIA SYMMETRY

**Working together:** Directors Kati Link and Ashleigh Renard attract skaters as young as 6 years old and create a fun, productive environment.

with just an hour's worth of practice.

The appeal is made even stronger when the kids are dressed alike using old stock-piled costumes from previous years' exhibitions and competitions.

As for the kids, especially those who have skated before, synchronized skating is a pleasant surprise for those who saw it as a more solitary endeavor.

"A lot of times they're like, 'Whoa, I can skate — with my friends?'" said Renard. "That's what we call getting bit by the synchro bug."

In fact, that team atmosphere is a big attraction for synchronized skating.

"We find that, especially in elementary school, skating can be a lonely sport," said Link. "In synchro there's camaraderie, and that keeps a lot of kids in longer than they would have been otherwise."

Link herself moved into figure skating and later synchronized skating after pursuing gymnastics as a child. She was forced to switch after hurting her shoulder, and

found the ice sports just as appealing.

"I always loved to jump," she recalled. "I loved the challenge of learning new jumps. That's what appealed to me."

Now, after years of skating and teaching, the merger with Philadelphia Symmetry allows her to do even more for her skaters than just train them on the ice.

"It's about learning to rise and fall and stay grounded," said Link. "It's a tough thing to teach, but this sport teaches it."

There's also much to be said, she continued, about learning teamwork and how to always find ways to improve. One of the organization's themes, for instance, is to always try to be "one percent better" for every drill, practice, exhibition or competition.

"When you're out competing, you do what you do and you do your best," said Link. "We all rise and fall together, and we learn from it."

For information on synchronized skating and upcoming events in Bucks County, visit [philadelphiasymmetry.org](http://philadelphiasymmetry.org) ••

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