



## DIX HILLS

# Rebels Reunite With Genesis Students

*Annual Buddy Skate again a success*

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The Long Island Rebels Youth Hockey players have been taking the ice at Dix Hills Ice Rink for more than 10 years and increasing their success over the past four. Originators Jerry Sullivan, Rich Righi and John Zerillo started the Buddy Skate program last year, in which Rebels players skate with children from the Genesis School for Autistic Children, in an effort to give something back to the community.

This year the event was held on December 31 at the Dix Hills Ice Rink.

“We want to have the kids also involved in community service projects and we closely track their academics,” Zerillo said. “It’s not like we’re just blind hockey and nothing else.”

This was the idea with which the Buddy Skate was born, and after a successful first run, the Rebels came out to make it happen again. The event gives full responsibility to the players, who spend the entire session with the students from the Genesis School. “As soon as the kids came in, the kids introduced themselves, took their shoes off, got their skates, tied them, showed them how to walk and stand on the skates,” Zerillo said. “From the time they got in the door to the time they were out the door the kids were with them. It was all peer contact not teacher contact.”

The one-on-one contact between peers positively affects both parties involved, while giving the teachers a break from the norm. “It worked really nicely. It’s an activity the kids normally cannot do on their own and an activity that their teachers normally can’t help them do because most of the time they are not experienced skaters,” Zerillo said.

The Rebels organization is comprised of 10 teams, with players ranging from 6 to 18 years old. Participating students from the Genesis School were between 7 and 8 years old, or 18 and 20 years old. Each player was matched up with a student from the Genesis School. “What we found last year is that, they brought 13 to 15 kids last year and it went very nicely. The thing that was missing was the families didn’t get to participate with the kids,” Zerillo said. “This year we invited the youths’ families in to participate ... this way they could enjoy it with the kids and see the kids enjoy it.”

Both sides walked away from the experience with a smile. “I think they got a ton out of it. They got to see how lucky they are for themselves, they got to see how good it feels to help somebody else that isn’t as lucky as they are and I think there were some bonds made,” Zerillo said. “I know kids that were there last year from my group, as the kids from the school were coming in, were looking and hoping to see the kids from last year.”

The Rebels received a note of thanks soon after from Kerry Brandine, program director at the Genesis School. “This is such a great opportunity for all our students to be in the community with kids their own age and do something enjoyable. I don’t think the players realize the impact they make on the students by treating them just like any other teenager and more importantly to the moms and dads who got to see their child with a typical peer doing a normal activity. The players are true inspirations to my staff at Genesis and I would love for you to share that with them,” the letter said.

The youths finished up the day with pizzas and holiday desserts.