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Area native develops skaters' Web sites

By Val Van Meter
The Winchester Star

STRASBURG — Do you know the favorite color of Mirai Nagasu, newly-crowned national champion figure skater?

Devon Stein does.

That's one of the first questions she asks, when she starts to design a Web site for a celebrity ice skater.

The James Wood High School graduate is currently Webmaster for the sites of about 10 ice skaters whose names you will see at the big contests, right up to the Olympics.

That includes the 14-year-old Nagasu, whose favorite color, if you check out her Web site, is obviously pink.

"Yes, she's very into pink," said Devon, who added that the teenager was very upset to find out that her coaches and others want to her wear fewer pink costumes in 2008.

Devon, who grew up on Apple Pie Ridge, appreciates the beauty and athleticism of skaters.

"I've been a fan since I was little," said the 2001 James Wood High School graduate. "I've followed it since the 1992 Olympics."

But, after some childhood attempts at ice skating, courtesy of a frozen ice patch in the yard, she's sure it's not her thing. She just loves to watch.

The better skater in the family is her husband, Adam, who never gave ice skating a thought, until he met Devon.

Adam works for a software developer in Fairfax, and his wife has

put his talents to work writing code for some of the sites she creates.

"He helps me a lot with coding and things you don't see" on the sites, she said.

And, she's steered him into using another of his talents, photography. Adam started out taking photos



Devon Stein (right) and Michelle Kwan visit backstage at the 2006 Champions on Ice tour. Devon, a James Wood High School graduate, is currently Webmaster for the sites of about 10 ice skaters.



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for Devon to use on her client's sites.

Of course, Devon has her own Web site, featuring the ones she's designed for herself and others: www.dholli.com.

But she opted to become a stay-at-home mother for 9-month-old son, Jackson.

Still, she hasn't had to completely give up her career in cyberspace. She's simply channeled that interest toward the sport she loves.

She's designing Web sites now for some of the brightest names in competition on the ice, such as 14-year-old Nagasu.

"I'm a volunteer," she explained. "No pay involved."

Many figure skaters today want official Web sites, Devon explained.

"Lots of fans see them on TV, but they don't know who they are."

The skaters enjoy posting pictures of themselves, in competition and sharing their thoughts, on their own sites.

But, she said, they seldom have the time or the expertise to create a site.

Some want a lot of control over their sites, she said, laying out exactly what should go where and what colors to use.

Others turn her loose to create a setting for them.

Devon works with Leah Adams, a top name in ice skating photography, who owns the site, www.figureskatersonline.com, and offers space on it to skaters.

"She has about seven or eight Webmasters" working on individual sites and there are about 30 skaters represented there now, Devon said.

Since Adams is at most competitions, she can e-mail current pictures of the skaters for Devon to update her sites.

"I uses some of Leah's pictures and I use some of Adam's," Devon noted.

Adam, a Sherando class of 2000 graduate who also attended Lord Fairfax Community College, started out squiring his wife to area contests.

"There are a lot in Hershey, Pa.," he noted and in the Washington, D.C. area and Delaware.

When he started shooting pictures, he found he needed to learn more about the sport.

"It's tricky," he admitted. Skaters are moving at a fast clip and you need to know their routines to catch the shot.

"I had to get used to some of the moves," he said, as well as linking skaters with the "signature" moves

each does.

"I'd nudge him," said Devon, when a good move was coming up.

Adam uses a Canon 20-D digital camera and the largest lens allowed at competitions.

And, yes, there are a lot of rules about taking pictures during competitions, which, naturally, don't allow flash cameras.

Adam has only recently been allowed "out on the ice" to get shots. Until now, he said, he's just been sitting with the other fans, and snapping from that angle.

At the National Championships, in Minnesota, he shot 8,000 pictures.

"We picked the best 2,000 to put up on our Web site," which is www.ice-skate.net, he said.

And, while they've been as far west as St. Louis to watch the action and follow their clients, there's never any time to actually "see the sights" at these spots. They are all business.

For Adam, learning the sport has meant going early in the morning to watch practice times.

That can make for a long day, Devon noted, arriving at an arena at 6 a.m. and leaving after the competition ends, which can run late into the night.

"And then you eat that arena food all day," she said with a grimace.

As they both become better known among the athletes, they've gotten more perks, including backstage passes and meetings with stars of the sport, such as Michelle Kwan, who has won two Olympic medals, nine U.S. Championships, and five World Championships, and Sasha Cohen, who was a silver medalist at the Olympics.

And, even though most skaters deal with Devon electronically, "sometimes, they even recognize me," she said with a trace of wonder.

They've met Michael Weiss, a former figure skater who has created a foundation to help aspiring athletes train to compete at national and international levels.

"It costs about \$75,000 a year to train," Devon noted. He gives scholarships to the top young skaters."

Nagasu was one beneficiary of such a scholarship, she added.

"She'll definitely be one to watch" in the next winter Olympics, Devon said.

Adam was recently hired to do a photo shoot for five-time U.S. Ice Dance Champions Naomi Lang and Peter Tchernyshev, in Pennsylvania.

"I guess it's not a hobby anymore, if you get paid for it," he mused.

He wouldn't turn down a chance to make ice skating

photography a full time job, he admitted, and ditch the daily commute to Northern Virginia.

Devon can manager her Web sites from just about anywhere, but it takes some traveling to get to even area contests, as there are no skating rinks in the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

"Our dream, if we win the lottery, is to open an ice skating rink in Winchester," Devon said.

"It's a lot of fun," said Adam of the trips and the competitions. And, acknowledging his wife's sport preference, he added, 'I know for Devon, it's been great."

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