

## = McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink =

McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink or McCormick Tribune Plaza is a multi @-@ purpose venue within Millennium Park in the Loop community area of Chicago , Illinois , in the United States . On December 20 , 2001 , it became the first attraction in Millennium Park to open . The \$ 3 @. @ 2 million plaza was funded by a donation from the McCormick Tribune Foundation . It has served as an ice skating rink , a dining facility and briefly as an open @-@ air exhibition space .

The plaza operates as McCormick Tribune Ice Rink , a free public outdoor ice skating rink that is generally open four months a year , from mid @-@ November until mid @-@ March , when it hosts over 100 @, @ 000 skaters annually . It is known as one of Chicago 's better outdoor people @-@ watching locations during the winter months . It is operated by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs rather than the Chicago Park District , which operates most major public ice skating rinks in Chicago .

For the rest of the year , it serves as Plaza at Park Grill or Park Grill Plaza , Chicago 's largest outdoor dining facility . The 150 @-@ seat park grill hosts various culinary events as well as music during its months of outdoor operation , and it is affiliated with the 300 @-@ seat indoor Park Grill restaurant located beneath AT & T Plaza and Cloud Gate . The outdoor restaurant offers scenic views of the park .

## = = History = =

Lying between Lake Michigan to the east and the Loop to the west , Grant Park has been Chicago 's front yard since the mid @-@ 19th century . Its northwest corner , north of Monroe Street and the Art Institute , east of Michigan Avenue , south of Randolph Street , and west of Columbus Drive , had been Illinois Central rail yards and parking lots until 1997 , when it was made available for development by the city as Millennium Park . As of 2007 , Millennium Park , which is located in the northwest corner of Grant Park , trails only Navy Pier as a Chicago tourist attraction .

The earliest plans for Millennium Park were unveiled by Chicago 's mayor , Richard M. Daley , in March 1998 and included " a reflecting pool that would double as a skating rink in winter " . The architectural firm of Skidmore , Owings & Merrill came up with the master plan for the park ; their original design for the ice rink placed it along upper Randolph Street , on the park 's northern edge . However , McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink was built on the western edge of Millennium Park . The Chicago Tribune 's Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning architecture critic Blair Kamin called this move " a masterstroke " and praised the new location " where the skaters symbolize the year @-@ round vitality of the city " . Kamin noted the location on the east side of Michigan Avenue allowed those at the plaza and ice rink to enjoy the skyline of the Historic Michigan Boulevard District . Another addition to the plaza and rink 's design was the 300 @-@ seat restaurant ; the final architectural design was completed by OWP & P Architects , who were also the architects for the adjoining Wrigley Square .

Although the rink was budgeted for \$ 5 million , it was constructed for only \$ 3 @. @ 2 million ( \$ 4 @. @ 3 million today ) , making it one of the few Millennium Park attractions to cost less than was initially budgeted . The rink was funded by and named for the McCormick Tribune Foundation , which was established by former Chicago Tribune owner and publisher Robert R. McCormick . The McCormick Tribune Foundation is a supporter of the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum and the McCormick Tribune Campus Center at the Illinois Institute of Technology , both of which are also located in Chicago .

McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink was the first feature in Millennium Park to open . Its grand opening was celebrated on December 20 , 2001 , a few weeks ahead of the Millennium Park underground parking garage . Mayor Daley , McCormick Tribune Foundation Chairman of the Board John W. Madigan , Millennium Park private donor group chief John Bryan , actress Bonnie Hunt and other local celebrities attended the event . The new ice rink was seen as a replacement for " Skate on State " , a public skating rink on State Street in the Loop which closed in 2001 .

From June 21 to September 15 , 2002 , McCormick Tribune Plaza hosted the inaugural exhibit in

Millennium Park , Exelon Presents Earth From Above by Yann Arthus @-@ Bertrand , a French aerial photographer . Arthus @-@ Bertrand used planes and helicopters to photograph sites in over 60 countries on every continent , and displayed more than 120 of these photographs in dozens of cities , starting in Paris and including Tokyo and Geneva . In the summer of 2002 , the book associated with the exhibit had sold over 1 @.@ 5 million copies , and the photographs were displayed in Brazil , Lebanon , Poland , Sweden , Germany , Britain , Norway , Hungary and along the banks of the Volga River in Russia .

Chicago was the first American city to host the Earth From Above exhibition . The exhibit featured 4 @-@ by @-@ 6 @-@ foot ( 1 @.@ 2 m × 1 @.@ 8 m ) photographic prints that were laminated onto thin 5 @-@ by @-@ 7 @-@ 5 @-@ foot ( 1 @.@ 5 m × 2 @.@ 3 m ) aluminum panels that protected them from ultraviolet rays . The photographs included scenes of natural beauty such as a Filipino Bajau village built on coral reefs , a formation of rocks in Madagascar , an inlet in the Ionian Islands that is home to endangered sea turtles , and architectural highlights such as the Palace of Versailles and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul . It also showed scenes of tragedy such as the 1999 earthquake in Turkey and the destruction of the Amazonian rain forest . The exhibit used photovoltaic solar panels to store electrical energy during the day that then lit the exhibit at night .

Part of the 2006 film The Weather Man , starring Nicolas Cage , was shot at the rink . In 2008 , Millennium Park hosted a winter celebration called the Museum of Modern Ice . The installation included a 95 @-@ by @-@ 12 @-@ foot ( 29 @.@ 0 m × 3 @.@ 7 m ) ice wall in the park and a large abstract painting by Gordon Halloran , which was embedded in the McCormick Tribune Ice Rink . The works were titled Paintings Below Zero . In 2008 ? 2009 the logo for the unsuccessful Chicago bid for the 2016 Summer Olympics was displayed in the rink 's ice .

The ice rink served as the " headquarters " for the 2011 edition of Hockey Weekend Across America ; the NHL on NBC broadcast its studio coverage from the rink on February 20 of that year . Eddie Olczyk opened the show by skating with the Stanley Cup in the Millennium Park rink .

= = Details = =

The ice skating rink at McCormick Tribune Plaza is 200 by 80 feet ( 61 by 24 m ) . Due to the rink 's rounded corners , the total skating surface is 15 @,@ 910 square feet ( 1 @,@ 478 m<sup>2</sup> ) , which critic Blair Kamin called " amply sized " . For comparison , this is a considerably larger skating surface than the Rockefeller Center rink in New York City , which is 120 by 60 feet ( 37 by 18 m ) .

The Millennium Park rink has a lobby which provides skaters a respite from the natural environs , as well as toilets and public lockers . During the 2003 ? 04 season the rink rented 77 @,@ 667 pairs of ice skates . By 2009 ? 2010 , its ninth season , it was attracting more than 100 @,@ 000 skaters a year . While availability of the rink depends on the weather , it also has a state @-@ of @-@ the @-@ art chiller system that can maintain the ice in the event of unseasonably warm weather . Thus , temperature is not the only factor involved in decisions to close the rink . In his review of the plaza and rink , Kamin gave it two stars ( out of a possible four ) , called the structure " solid , though unremarkable " , and praised its uses throughout the year .

When the rink is closed , its surface becomes a 150 @-@ seat cafe that complements the 300 @-@ seat indoor Park Grill dining facility . Street level features such as McCormick Tribune Plaza are linked to elevated features such as Cloud Gate and AT & T Plaza , which are atop the Park Grill Restaurant and can be reached via balustraded stairs .

= = Operations = =

Through 2006 and 2007 , the McCormick Tribune Ice Rink was one of several operated by the Chicago Park District . Since then , although the Chicago Park District still operates ten public ice skating rinks , the Millennium Park ice rink is operated by a division of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs , itself a Department of the City of Chicago Government .

= = = Ice rink = = =

McCormick Tribune Ice Rink is generally open for skating afternoons and evenings seven days a week , with longer hours on weekends . However , it is occasionally closed for private events . Skating is free and skate rental is available . Except for its first year , the rink has been scheduled to be open from mid @-@ November until mid @-@ March , weather permitting . For the 2009 ? 10 winter season , the rink is scheduled to be open from November 20 , 2009 to March 14 , 2010 , with abbreviated holiday schedules on Thanksgiving , Christmas Eve , Christmas Day and New Year 's Eve . Skating is accompanied by loudspeaker music , which is mostly seasonal music during the holidays .

Rink attendance is heavier on the weekends and other times when school is not in session . Romantic holidays such as Christmas Eve and Valentine 's Day are also quite crowded . The ice rink is a popular people watching location during the winter months ; many view events at the McCormick Tribune Plaza from AT & T Plaza , above and to the east . The ice skating rink has become so popular that when the weather was too warm for the rink 's opening in November 2005 , the story became international news . The book 1 @,@ 000 Places to See in the U.S.A. & Canada Before You Die suggests a visit to McCormick Tribune Plaza during the skating season , and describes Millennium Park as a renowned attraction .

There are days when themed skating is encouraged . Santa attire was encouraged on Saturday , December 13 , 2008 , and zombie attire was encouraged the next day , as part of an attempt to set a Guinness World Record for number of zombies on ice . The rink also serves as a host to the annual Chicago Winter Dance Festival ; during the festival there is a month of free skating instruction and demonstration at the rink , and there is free dance instructions behind the glass doors of the Jay Pritzker Pavilion stage .

= = = Park Grill Plaza = = =

During much of the offseason alfresco dining is available in a 150 @-@ seat cafe set up on the ice rink , in what is then referred to as the Park Grill Plaza . This outdoor dining experience is associated with the Park Grill Restaurant and the Park Grill Cafe , which are both located under the Cloud Gate on AT & T Plaza . Architecture critic Blair Kamin compares the in @-@ park eating options availed at the Park Grill with New York 's former Tavern on the Green and Chicago 's Cafe Brauer . The Park Grill Plaza is the largest outdoor dining venue in Chicago , and hosts a variety of events , including a benefit called " Chefs on the Grill " in which guests interact with invited chefs who are competing to produce the best dish . Wine tastings are also hosted there , and during the summer , the Park Grill Plaza hosts musical performances on Thursdays . During the skating season , there are rinkside tables and the Park Grill Cafe offers take out and to @-@ go service . Outdoor dining service begins in May .

McCormick Tribune Plaza & Ice Rink is one of two features in the park to include accessible restrooms ; the other is Jay Pritzker Pavilion . The restrooms are located adjacent to the Park Grill . Although McCormick Plaza is a winter focal point , the park 's restroom facilities at this feature are not heated for winter use .

According to Fodor 's , the restaurant is known for a view that makes up for unimpressive service . However , Citysearch speaks positively about the service . Metromix , Fodor 's and Frommer 's all laud the location of the restaurant , which serves New American cuisine . Frommer 's gives the restaurant 2 out of 3 stars and notes that the restaurant has a kids menu to accommodate the numerous families that visit the park . Metromix notes that the restaurant is well known for its signature Park Grill Burger . The northern area of the Plaza has been named the North Lounge and has furniture for lounging ; it has a distinct menu including options from the Plaza 's menu , as well as its own offerings . The indoor restaurant has seating for 300 , a VIP room , and serves dinner , lunch , and weekend brunch .