**Yes, Women Play Ice Hockey!**

**-by Jenny Sumner**

“You play ice hockey?” is a question that female ice hockey players get asked on a routine basis. And the answer is a resounding “yes.” Yes, women do play ice hockey. In fact, the sport continues to grow in Florida, and, thanks to the Florida Women’s Hockey League (FWHL), women in the state have an organization of their own in which to play the game that they love.

“The FWHL is so unique: it’s a league organized for women, by women, and it is all about hockey,” say Karen Ota-O’Brien, current FWHL President and one of the founding members of the league. “The FWHL has members who are moms, teachers, firefighters, business owners; we have women in all walks of life and at all skills levels playing ice hockey together. It’s really fun to see!”

Jenny Sumner, also a founding member and former FWHL president agrees. “It is amazing to see the growth of women’s ice hockey here in Florida. The FWHL was started 15 years ago to provide camaraderie and competition to female ice hockey players, and we are still going strong. I am certain that the league has contributed to the growth of women’s hockey in Florida, both by offering a place for women to play in an organized fashion, as well as by helping to promote the sport throughout the State.”

Indeed, the increasing number of women playing ice hockey in Florida is impressive. According to USA Hockey, during the 2015-2016 season, there were 542,583 registered ice hockey players across the nation, the most in the 79-year history of USA Hockey; this represents an increase of 9,411 players from the 2014-15 season, or a growth of 4.78%. Florida had its share in this growth, with 13,276 registered ice hockey players—the most of any of the 12 states in USA Hockey’s Southeastern district—and 727 registered female hockey players.

“With so many women now playing ice hockey in Florida, we know it is important for them to have a place that they can call their own,” says Ota-O’Brien. “That’s why the FWHL was founded in 2002, and why we continue to support women’s ice hockey teams from all around the State. We now have eleven teams, including the Jacksonville Breakers, the Brandon Hockey Chicks, the Central Florida Honey Badgers, the Palm Beach Snappers, the Fort Myers Lady Everblades, the Fort Lauderdale Lucky Pucks, the Tampa Ms. Conduct, and the Cape Coral Sea-Gals. We also welcome teams from out-of-state to play in our various tournaments each season.”

As Sumner concludes, “The FWHL is a league that offers opportunities for women to socialize and to have fun around the sport that they enjoy, and we welcome all women skaters, no matter the skill level.”

The FWHL kicks off its 15th season in September, and will host five different tournaments throughout the season. To join the FWHL, or to find out more about the league, please visit the FWHL website at <http://www.fwhlonline.com>.