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JAMAICA PLAIN

Hyde Square backyard 'Snow Palace' a haven for the 'big kids'

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 14, 2011 10:00 AM

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(Courtesy: Anne Phillips)

Becky Smith's backyard in Hyde Square boasts a large snow palace, and a reason why not everyone in Boston hopes recent groundhogs' predictions of an early spring were true.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

For many in the area, this week's forecasted rise in temperatures cannot come soon enough. But one Hyde Square resident is crossing her fingers that the above-freezing mercury levels won't melt away her icy, newly-built backyard bastion.

"I think I'm the only person in the neighborhood who wants it to stay cold and to have a bunch more snow," said Becky Smith, 33, proud owner and co-builder of a 113-square foot, roof-less snow lair.

In the backyard of the three-story apartment building Smith moved into about six years ago, she and an all-adult, dozen-person team recently constructed "Snow Palace 2011" – a six-foot radius circular mega snow fort with a portable fire pit centerpiece surrounded by five-foot, two-inch tall, all-snow walls to match

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haven for 'big kids' Smith's height, with a couple of windows and an entrance adorned with white holiday lights.

It's a "big kids" creation that would fulfill the dreams of snow-loving New England children, and really anyone who discovered as a youngster, like Smith did once upon a time, the imaginative genius of assembling an indoor hideout using a combination of chairs, blankets and couch cushions when snow wasn't readily available.

Between snow-carved benches and several pieces of patio furniture that had been buried in the now-structural backyard snow, the wintry space can seat all 12 who helped make it with room for more to stand. The fort also features built-in cup holders to keep beverages frosty – no koozies necessary; it is, after all, a palace.

"I've never done anything like this before," said Smith, after giving a tour of the palace grounds Friday evening to an upstairs neighbor who had seen from above, but not yet visited the frozen estates.

A native of Mississippi, Smith had lived in warmer climates much of her life and didn't experience her first winter until living in South Dakota the year before relocating to Jamaica Plain, where she's lived since.

"It's still novel to me," she said of Boston winters and the snow that comes with them. "I just decided I needed to win winter ... I've realized the more I shrink away and hide from winter, the more miserable it makes me."

Aside from this latest project, Smith said she also sleds, cross-country skis and walks around the city to keep her spirits up during Boston's bleakest months.

The structure was designed by an architect who is a friend of Smith's and sketched back-of-an-envelope plans for the snow lair. Initial attempts to start construction were futile – the powdery snow wouldn't stay together. But, after a seemingly-endless wave of winter storms brought heavier snow and, at times, rain and ice, the effort resumed.

On Super Bowl Sunday, crews began digging in to several feet of snow just before noon. Shovels, wheelbarrows, recycling bins and, the project's sole expense, several small Tupperware containers, were used to collect the snow and compact it into bricks stacked to create the igloo. Roughly five hours later, and in time to watch the big game, the palace was complete.

"This project was really a community-builder among some of my friends," not all of whom knew one another, said Smith. "There were jokes about bringing the TV into the snow palace," to watch the NFL's championship game, but that never happened.

Smith's husband, Moody Jandhyala, 41, and the couple's cat, Mr. Guthrie, are both Texas natives, but both enjoy their new seasonal backyard hangout.

The trio hosted an afternoon snow castle gathering around a fire with friends on Thursday, another Sunday and plan to keep extending invitations to those they know for as long as Mother Nature doesn't take back the unique opportunity she's given them.

Smith's job as a program coordinator for a national grassroots environmental advocacy organization occasionally allows her to work from home, and she is considering trying the fort out as an office.

She added that she included "2011" in the naming of her snow home because

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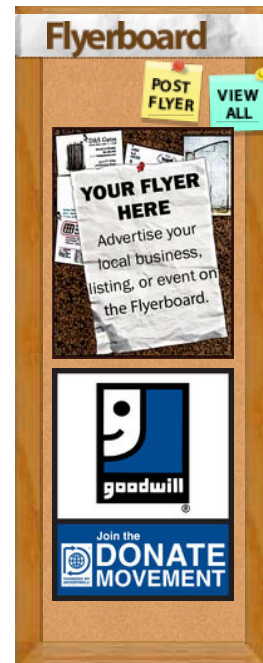
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she doesn't expect this winter's project will be her last.

"We have lots of plans for next year," Smith said.

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(Courtesy: Laurence Daheron)

A group photo of the snow fort construction team: (from left to right) Monica, Kendra, Paula, Becky G., Becky Smith, Anne, Shannon, Joe, Laurence, Jill, Bethany, and Bobby Joe.



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