

# Performer shares the magic of 'Disney on Ice'

BY ALICE E. GERARD

Janie Ochitwa discovered her passion as a small child when she saw a performance of Mary Poppins in an ice show. At the age of 6, she began taking lessons in figure skating, and the skater who played the role of Mary Poppins became her coach.

Today, Ochitwa, a native of Denver, Colorado, who has won a number of championships, including the U.S. Figure Skating Association as a double gold medalist in moves in the field and free skate, is living her dream, performing as an ensemble cast member in "Disney on Ice Let's Celebrate."

This show, which presents more than 50 Disney characters from the early days of Disney to the present, will be in the KeyBank Center in Buffalo from Jan. 27-30.

Ochitwa said she is very enthusiastic about this show, which features 14 classic and modern Disney stories, including "Beauty and the Beast," "Frozen" and "Aladdin."

"What makes me the most excited about this show is that we have the most Disney characters of any 'Disney on Ice' show," Ochitwa said. "You get to see characters from the very beginning of Disney, like Snow White and Pinocchio, and some newer favorites, like the



"Disney on Ice" returns to Buffalo. (Images courtesy of "Disney on Ice")

'Frozen' characters and 'Finding Dory' characters and 'Toy Story 4' characters. It's really just something for everybody in this show."

A fan of Disney movies, Ochitwa said she knows the words to almost every Disney song.

"I think that what makes me the most excited is that I was raised as a Disney fan, so I have loved these characters for my entire life," she said. "Getting to combine two things that I love is just kind of the perfect job for me to be doing, and I get so much joy every single day of my life. I couldn't be happier."

Ochitwa's route to "Disney on



Ice" was full of practice and hard work and determination.

"Skating was a part of growing up because, whatever I was going through, skating was always there," she said. "No matter what I was feeling off the ice, I was able to get on the ice and turn my mind off and experience the joy of being on the ice and being able to move my body and learn. You learn life skills growing up in a sport. You learn perseverance, and you learn how to work hard. You learn how

to give your entire self to something. I feel like it does translate to regular life, because of all these life skills that I've learned. I feel like I'm so much better off in my adult life now."

The level of perseverance that Ochitwa described helped her get through challenges.

"The ice is not very forgiving," she said. "When you're learning a new jump or you're learning a new spin, you fall. It's not a very forgiving surface. It's hard. I kind of use it as fuel to push me further and harder. It does take a while to train yourself to keep going, but the payoff at the end is so great. There's that little voice in your head that says, 'Keep going. You're going to get it.'"

Ochitwa has been a member of the "Disney on Ice" cast since 2017. She said she was helping her sister, Annie, with a move when she found out she got the job.

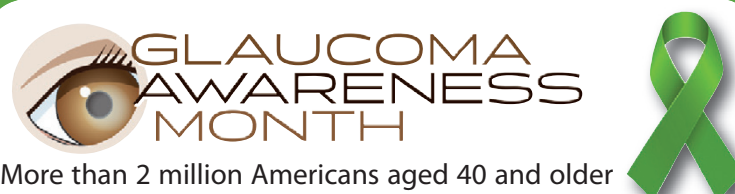
"My older sister went to college in Tucson, Arizona. My mom and I were in Arizona, helping her move

apartments. I was in the middle of a container store, when I got the email saying that I was going to join 'Disney on Ice,'" she said. "It was such an extraordinary experience for such an ordinary activity. It was kind of like ... oh my gosh! I'm never going to be able to walk into a container store without feeling that same super excited feeling of getting my first offer with 'Disney on Ice.' It's something that I will always associate with moving or going to get hangers or something so ordinary."

Her family, she said, has been very supportive of her ice skating dreams.


"My mom has been my biggest fan for as long as I can remember. She was absolutely over the moon and my dad was, as well. I have such a wonderful support system at home that they made transitioning into this world so easy and so exciting, and it was very, very nice," Ochitwa said.

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