

RINKSIDER

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July-Aug 2009

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Follow George Babineau's prescription for turning a plain, unpopular rink into a successful FEC that focuses on roller skating via many unique offerings and partnerships.

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Help yourself and your business by attending the 2009 RSA Convention and Trade Show at the Flamingo Las Vegas, August 9-13. Visit the additional trade show booths presented by this year's partnership with the ILTA. Enjoy FREE room upgrades. Partake in the Roller Skating University and many informative seminars. Make this your summer vacation!

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Gather risk management tips from USA Rink's risk management guru Nancy Giltner. Be prepared and reduce liability and claims by training staff, maintaining a checklist and adhering to the good advice Nancy shares in this issue.

Wisc. roller skating center volunteers mentor a community



Pictured left to right are volunteer floor guards-mentors Fred Lamping, Dan Zarling, Kenneth Tatum, John Lamping and Bryan Bukowski. Each man offers his time weekly at Incredi-Roll Skate and Family Fun Center in West Allis, Wisc., acting as a role model and mentor to kids in this underprivileged community.

By Suzy Weinland

Cory and Becky Hundley, owners and operators of Incredi-Roll Skate and Family Fun Center in West Allis, Wisc., have watched a wonderful trend evolve at their rink over the past few years.

In this primarily inner-city location, the skaters are about 90 percent African-American. Several men – and one woman – have stepped up to the skating floor, so to speak, to offer a parental presence amidst a large number of single-parent families.

A select group of adult volunteers

spend their Saturday and Sunday afternoons gliding around Incredi-Roll on skates and offering personal guidance, direction and pointers on skating. The recipients are typically African-American boys of all ages.

Owner Cory Hundley explained, "We'll have two (volunteers) from 9:30 to noon, two from 12:30-3 and then three or four from 3:30-6, the session they most frequent and get the most 'pow' out of. We also have volunteers at our 3:30-6 session on Sundays.

"(The kids) love these guys and the parents love these guys because they are disciplinarians, but at the same time are kind of like a father figure, teaching the kids to skate out there on the floor."

It's just a fact in this community that there are not a lot of fathers involved, explained Hundley. "Moms come in and see these men taking an active roll and teaching their kids."

The two leaders of the volunteer group are biblically-centered, and one of the weekly volunteers is a school principal. "They really have a strong moral code," Hundley shared. "Men in the community will come up and ask if they can be a volunteer and these two will say, 'Let me watch you for a few weeks and see how you interact with the people.'" Then the men

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Fundraisers, school events create steady income in tough times and beyond

By Jim Morris

Every skating rink and family fun center has its tried and true programs and sessions that are counted on to produce the bulk of the revenue each year.

But as times get tougher, rink operators



find themselves forced to become more innovative, constantly coming up with new ideas for

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A birthday child gets a chance in the money machine at Skateland Indianapolis.

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Roundup (cont'd from page 1)

bringing people – and their dollars – through the doors.

With schools out and some of the usual summer doldrums at hand, here are some ideas from three rink operators to keep the revenue river flowing.

Focus on family

“We do anything and everything we can think of,” said Tara Cobb, marketing and sales director for Skateland Indianapolis.

To prepare for the summer slowdown, Skateland distributes about 75,000 summer passes to Indianapolis students before school lets out. That’s just one way to compete with all of the other activities children have going on in the summer.

Using the theme, “Family Fitness and Fun,” the rink is offering a free session every Thursday throughout the summer. Of course there is revenue to be made from skate rentals, food sales, redemption and merchandise sales once people are in the rink. And it allows people who have never been to Skateland to find out what a nice facility it is so they will come back again and again.

On Wednesday nights in the summer, skaters can enter for \$1 and a roll of paper towels. Toward the end of the summer they switch from towels to school supplies, which are then donated throughout the community.

“That saves us from buying paper towels and they usually last through the fall. We use a lot of paper towels, so that’s one thing we don’t have to buy,” Cobb said.

She said the rink also has stepped up publicity without paying for increased advertising by taking advantage of new technology. She consistently uses Facebook, MySpace and Twitter along with the rink’s Web site (skatelandindy.com) and email blasts to get the word out about upcoming activities.

Fund-raisers are also an important part of the rink’s effort to boost revenue. They partner up with school organizations such as PTOs. They sell admission tickets to the organization, which then sells them to the public at a higher rate. Sometimes the rink includes skate rental, all-you-can-eat pizza and tokens.

“We can include just about anything. It all depends on what they want in their package,” Cobb said.

Among the most popular fund-raisers are the Circle of Friends Gospel Skates. Many different churches participate and often members attend fund-raisers for other churches, just to help out. The rink promotes each session on its Web site and has a dedicated line on its voice mail to get the information out.

Speaking of pizza, every Friday from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m., the rink has an “All-You-Can-Cram-Pizza-Jam.” For \$8, a customer gets admission, skate rental, all-you-can-eat pizza and soda.

“Everything we do is geared toward family value and fun,” she said. “We know that when people come in the door they want to be entertained, so we always have something special going on. We want them to have a great time. If they have fun, chances are they will come back.”

Competition is the key

At Cal Skate of Milpitas, near San Francisco, the skating center uses the natural competition between nine area schools to boost rink attendance and create additional revenue.

For the annual DARE Skate in the spring, to the school with the largest

attendance, the rink donated 25 percent of the admissions, skate rentals and snack bar sales for that afternoon. About 450 showed up. The winning school took home a check for \$535.



Skaters at Skateland Indianapolis take a break during a church fundraiser.

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“They were really pleased with that,” said Chris St. Germain-Frank, owner of Cal Skate of Milpitas. “It was just a two-hour session. Next year we will make it three hours ... so we can generate more sales at the snack bar.”

She said she would like to put on a similar fund-raiser in the fall that would benefit some segment of the community and bring more people into the rink. Again, she would capitalize on the competition between schools.

During the summer, in order to compete with a local amusement park, the rink sells a Summer Fun Card. It allows the card holder to get in free to every session – except Saturday nights – throughout the summer. Those who bought the card before May 31 got it for \$49. After June 1, the price went up to \$69. They can even obtain a Buddy Pass to bring in a friend for free.

“We had a lot of people come back who had the card last year, so they must have felt it was a good value,” St. Ger-

main-Frank said. “We’re promoting it as a ‘recession buster.’”

To promote the card, the rink passed out flyers to everyone leaving the rink during the spring and early summer and posted it on its Web site, calskatemilpitas.com.

To St. Germain-Frank, one of the most valuable people on her staff is the person manning the door. Not only does this person greet new arrivals, but he or she also makes sure people get the latest promotions before they leave.

“Those people are really sales people. They have to make everyone aware of all of the things we offer. It’s a lot better than just leaving flyers in a stack on the counter,” she said.

\$6,000 in admission fees, it makes about that much from the snack bar, games and competitions during each lock-in.

At 3 a.m. Hardesty shows a G-rated movie on the large blank wall behind his new karaoke stage. During all of the skating sessions, the children can see their own images on that screen as the rink takes videos of the kids in action.

“They love seeing themselves and their friends on the big screen,” Hardesty said.

Soon after the movie ends, the rink provides breakfast – sausage gravy and biscuits, doughnuts and juice or milk, etc. – and then sends everyone home.

“The lock-ins really go over well,” Hardesty explained. “But you can only have them every three months or so because if you have them more frequently the novelty will wear off.”

He said he runs each lock-in with six staff members, including him and his wife. Hardesty, who has managed the rink for three years, not only has been to every lock-in, but has not missed any session at Skates Alive since he started there.

Another large event at the rink each year is the Muscular Dystrophy Skate-a-thon every August. Hardesty splits the admission price 50-50 with MDA. It draws more than 600 people. He has plenty of room to grow, since the capacity of the 20-year-old rink is 1,365.

Although it seems like a small revenue producer, Hardesty came up with a simple idea that has brought in over \$600 since the beginning of the year. He placed a shot glass in the bottom of an empty gallon jug, cut a slit in the lid and challenged everyone to drop a quarter into the shot glass. Those who accomplish it get a free soft drink.

“You would not believe how many times I have seen a kid spend \$7 to win a \$1.25 drink,” Hardesty said. “When the quarter falls, it’s turning every which direction so it’s anybody’s guess whether it goes in or not.”

“It has brought in more than \$600 and we’ve given away maybe 40 drinks, tops.”

But the jug game doesn’t end there. Hardesty took the proceeds from the jug and invested them into a T-shirt printing machine.

“Each shirt costs us \$1.49 and we sell them for \$10,” he said.

That leads to another activity the kids love: shirt toss. Hardesty’s staff has a large rubber-band shirt shooter, so during the Friday and Saturday night skating sessions, they will shoot several rolled-up t-shirts into the crowd.

“We provide a lot of ways for kids to have fun here,” Hardesty said. “And I have fun every time I walk in the door or I wouldn’t be here.”

Lucrative lock-ins

How would you like to make \$10,000 in one session?

Skates Alive in Owensboro, Ky, does it about four times a year. From 500-600 children attend the rink’s lock-ins, held about every three months.

“We are well known in this town for our lock-ins,” said Joe Hardesty, manager of Skates Alive. “They really look forward to the lock-ins and we’re the cheapest baby sitters parents can find.”

Each session costs \$10 per person. It starts at 6 p.m. and ends at 6 a.m. Children, ages 10 through 17, can arrive at the rink until midnight.

“Once you come in, you cannot leave without a parent’s permission,” Hardesty said.

Skates Alive lives up to its name during the lock-ins, because from the time the children enter the 30,000-square-foot rink there is plenty for them to do. There are carnival games with prizes, drawings, competitions, 35 arcade games with redemption, dancing and, of course, skating. And when they get hungry, the snack bar is stocked up and serving all night.

While the rink brings in \$5,000-