

Pa. rink's home-school skate sessions offer curriculum credits, socialization

By Jan Mowle



A visit by the local fire department to Magic Elm Skateland in Hanover, Pa., helps fulfill the fire safety requirement for home-schoolers.

Between birthday parties, school skates and public skating sessions, skating rink operators often feel they have tapped every possi-

ble source of revenue. However, with the trend in more children being home schooled, there is a huge group that can be catered to as well.

Gary Miller, operator of Magic Elm Skateland in Hanover, Penn., was fortunate enough to have a large home-school organization come to him with an idea for incorporating roller skating into the group's events. Whether it is for physical education requirements or just socialization outside the kids' homes, this could potentially be an untapped market in many rinks.

Miller said the home-school group gets together and does different events throughout the year and roller skating is just one of them.

"We usually do four events a year," Miller said, "but we're looking at doing six a year starting this fall."

The events he does with the local home-school organization currently take place in September, November, January and April, and each event has a different theme.

In September, the skating center puts on a fire-safety seminar with help from the local fire department. The home-schooled kids have to have a certain amount of fire-safety training, so

Miller offers this session to fulfill that requirement for the group.

"The fire department does a 45-minute presentation to the kids," Miller added, "and the kids skate after that. The owner of the Domino's Pizza next door gives a free slice of pizza to each child for that event because his kids are involved in the home-school organization."

As the largest of the four events Miller offers, the September event draws about 180 to 220 people.

Since home-schooled kids don't have pictures taken like those at traditional schools do, Miller brings in a professional photographer for home-school picture day in November.

"They get their professional pictures done just like they would in a regular school," Miller said. "The parents can look at the finished pictures right on a computer screen and choose which ones they want right there and then.

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Quads are regaining lost ground, but inlines are here to stay

By Connie Evener

During any given session at the Ron-A-Roll Skate Center in Vernon, Conn., thirty percent of the skaters on the floor wear inline skates, some rented from Ron-A-Roll's inline fleet. Group classes are generally divided right down the middle with fifty percent of the skaters learning on traditional quads and fifty percent on inlines.

But when it comes to sales, only ten percent of the skates sold by Ron-A-Roll's pro shop are inlines. "That's because you can get inline skates everywhere - Dick's Sports Authority and other sporting goods stores - whereas quad skates aren't available there and they are here," explained operations manager Jennifer Conde, but, she added, whether inline or quad, "the beauty of buying skates from a rolling skating center with a pro shop is that we service what we sell."

The Ron-A-Roll Chargers are inline enthusiasts. Ranging in age from nine to 60, the speed team is coached by Jennifer's husband, Jesus Conde, who won the regional Junior Olympic Senior Men's Division Speed Championship back in 1984 and was one of the first to

wear inlines in a New England Speed League meet. Jesus estimates that roughly ninety percent of speed skaters use inlines.

With inlines, Jennifer explained, the wheels are "in a line with one another, so there's less of a surface area where they could hit a rock or pebble," and that's a major consideration as many speed meets are outdoors.

Speed skaters aside, though, Jennifer Conde has seen traditional quad skates gain back some ground from inlines over the past few years. For a time it seemed as though beginner skaters tended to start out on inlines. One big reason, she said, was the availability of adjustable inline skates. "As the children grow, the skates grow with them so they can get a few years out of them," a nice option for budget-conscious families with kids whose shoe sizes seem to change every few months.

But those younger children are also easily influenced by what they see on TV. "There has been a resurgence of traditional roller skates because Britney Spears put out a quad skate," Jennifer noted. These days there are also quad



Jesus Conde (back row, right) coaches The Ron-A-Roll Chargers, an indoor speed-skating team comprised of mostly beginner speed skaters ranging in age from ages 9 to 60. The group has only been skating together a few months and already has five first places and two fifth places from just two races.

skates for kids "endorsed" by Barbie, Heelys, a sort of sneaker with a single Disney, Spiderman and others.

There's also a new competitor:

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Kentucky's Skate Box celebrates first anniversary with new look

By Kathy Bergstrom

With an updated look and fresh ideas, a Bowling Green, Ky., skating rink has found new life.

In August, David and Cynthia Gillock celebrated their first year of owning The Skate Box. They bought the former Greenwood Skate Center in August 2007 and updated the 28-year-old rink's décor and policies to bring in more skaters.

David Gillock, 33, has been in the roller rink business for 18 years starting with a job at the Champs rink in Louisville, Ky., when he was 15 years old. Together he and wife Cynthia have operated three rinks.

They operated a rink in Mount Washington and later Louisville, Ky., until they lost their lease. They moved that business, which they called Valley Skate Zone, to a defunct rink in Valley Station, Ky. They refurbished and operated that rink for six years until The Kroger Co. bought out the site to build a superstore.

With two young children, the couple wanted to move to a smaller community with a good school system.

Daughter Summer is 11 and has won three division national titles in roller skating. Son Austin is 6.

The Gillocks found their opportunity in Bowling Green.

Greenwood Skate Center was the only rink in Bowling Green, a community of about 53,000 people in a metro area of more than 110,000. "I've been doing this since I was 15, and you could just see the potential there," David Gillock said.

The couple bought the rink for \$1.2 million and have made it their own. They closed the rink for two weeks for a \$65,000 remodeling project.

The rink was "stuck in the '70s and we brought it up to date," Gillock said.

The walls got new carpeting and the rink floor was refinished with a glow-in-the-dark roll-on product.

The new owners also updated the

bathrooms and built a skate room for rentals.

They built a new DJ booth and installed new lighting from American DJ Supply. The sound system was updated from CDs to a digital format.

Before the Gillocks acquired the rink, business had slowed down to about 50 to 60 skaters on a weekend night, David

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Eleven-year-old Summer Gillock, daughter of Skate Box owners David and Cynthia Gillock, does a hand stand on roller skates at her parents' newly refurbished skating center in Bowling Green, Ky.



Quads and inlines *(cont'd from page 14)*

wheel in the heel. "Kids can kind of run and then glide on that wheel," Jennifer explained. Some kids have used Heelys at Ron-A-Roll, but, said Jennifer, "We find that they don't enjoy using them around the rink and end up renting skates instead."

According to the Roller Skating Association International (RSA), "An American Sports Data survey revealed 10.8 million people roller skate (traditional quad skating.) Another 29 million inline skate." Although the proportions are considerably different in most roller rinks, wise owners and operators take inline skates seriously.

So, not only does Ron-A-Roll's pro-shop offer both quads and inlines for sale or rental, they also help customers decide which skate will best meet their needs. For those considering switching from quads to inlines, they recommend renting and skating on a pair of inlines.

Jennifer sees quad and inline skates as "different animals." While quad skates have a toe stop, inlines have a heel brake. "So you're using different muscles and strategies with how you

skate," Jennifer said. In Connecticut, where there are more ice rinks than roller rinks, there's another factor to consider: "People who ice skate may be more adaptable to inline skating because they're used to that single blade underneath them." And Jennifer's heard that snow skiers also tend to prefer inlines.

Does that mean inlines are more popular in snow country? Not really, said Jennifer. "In warmer climates, people may be skating outdoors more. Out in California they have beautiful boardwalks where there are a lot of inline skaters. A lot of places around the country have outdoor paved bike trails, rail trails and greenways. That's probably made inline skating more popular as well."

Whether a skater likes inlines or quads is strictly a matter of personal preference, Jennifer said. Although the trend today seems to be that quads are regaining lost ground, inlines are by no means "dying out." So it makes good sense for operators to do what they can to keep their inline customers just as happy as their quad customers.

The Spin on wheels *(cont'd from page 10)*

Roller derby requires good grip and maximum speed

"Derby skaters demand Poly-BD on wide or narrow wheels for indoor play and a more durable 88A for outdoor play on smooth concrete or on portable tile floors like roller hockey players play on," said McFadden. And roller derby girls are setting some colorful trends by mixing wheels to get both grip and speed. "It's like race car drivers with tires that are different sizes and different hardnesses," Ball said.

When it comes to choosing the right wheels, skating ability and the height and weight of the skater need to be considered. "If you take a girl that's six or seven-years-old and put her on a large wheel, for inline skating, let's say, she won't be able to go as fast," noted Ball. "It'll take her longer to get going on the bigger wheel, just like it would on a bicycle."

Another factor to consider is that not all rinks are the same. "Some have wood floors; some have concrete or

asphalt or particle board with plastic over it. And all the wheels function differently on each of those different surfaces," said Ball. The humidity in a rink can affect how slippery the floor gets, too.

What it boils down to, Ball pointed out, is what the individual skater wants to accomplish. For recreational skaters, the differences will be negligible. "But for the skater who wants to get really serious about a particular venue, they're going to have to match the wheel to the type of surface." And sometimes customers may need some common sense guidance in choosing wheels for how they'll be used, rather than what color they are or how they look.

The ultimate experts on wheels and your rink will probably be thrilled to give you some advice. Consult with your top skaters, advised McFadden. "Enthusiasts are always buying new wheels. They're switching out colors, trying new models, or checking out the performance of new wheels. They'll help you choose the right wheels for your display and after-market sales."