

HOT SPOT

By Art Snyder

The vigilant rink operator is the happy rink operator. That's because he or she does what it takes day in and day out to please the customer. So put that vigilance to work as you digest the latest news from "biggies" like Hershey, Mars, Coca-Cola, General Mills and Disney, among others. Better profits lie straight ahead. All the news details are below.

Mac & Cheese Crackers

Macaroni-and-cheese is a meal synonymous with young consumers, so Kraft's Nabisco brand has taken the idea to the next step and introduced Mac & Cheese Crackers. Available in a single-portion boxes and bags, Mac & Cheese Crackers is a sure-fire hit with a large number of your rink customers, so be sure to stock this winner in vending and



foodservice areas of your rink. Ask your supplier for extra promotional signage, too. And delight your birthday party guests with boxes or bags of Mac & Cheese Crackers, as well.

Hershey candies

In a very tough economy, Hershey looks better than ever. The reason? The company returned to its candy roots and pumped up advertising for core products under the fabled Hershey and Reese's banners. The results? While many other candy manufacturers saw sales slide in the past year, Hershey products enjoyed an enviable 4 percent sales boost. You need to stock customer favorites with Hershey and Reese's varieties at your snack counter and in your vending areas.

Plus, accent your birthday and other private sessions with appropriate Hershey and Reese's specials, prizes and other additions.

Mars Fling, Charged

With the catchphrase "Naughty but not that naughty," Mars Snackfood has introduced their latest candy bar: Fling. Fling is finger-shaped and offers the taste of both milk and dark chocolate, covered with a smooth hazelnut coating. Mars retails Fling in a single pack of two "fingers" for 79 cents. Fling was introduced in recent weeks in California, and rollout is expected across the country as the year

goes on.

Promising a taste-tempting candy with an energized kick, the top-selling Snickers brand from Mars Snackfood has introduced its latest variation on that brand: Snickers Charged. The key to Charged echoes the enhanced ingredients seen in many energy soft drinks — caffeine, taurine and B-vitamins. The Charged caffeine level is about the same as an 8-ounce serving of an energy beverage or coffee. If Charged passes the taste test with your rink customers, you should see a strong demand for the "energized" candy.

Talk to your supplier soon for details, signage and promotional materials and discounts for Fling and Charged alike.

Guru energy drinks

Competition is fierce with energy

GURU ENERGY DRINK

drinks, with literally hundreds of brands to consider stocking for thirsty skaters. One that stands out with taste, catchy name, advertising, style and a broad mix of varieties is Guru. The company keys its appeal on giving a boost to sports activities, and it offers Guru varieties in iced tea, lemonade and other formulations.

General Mills news

Snack-food leader General Mills continues to innovate, and you can count on their overall excellence and solid marketing campaigns to generate consumer demand and sales, and added profits for you. This holds for vended, rack and counter sales alike. Look for these top products to stock in your rink this year (not all products are yet available in all markets): Bugles Sweet & Salty Chocolate Peanut Butter, Bugles Sweet & Salty Caramel, Chocolate Chunk Chex Mix Bar, Turtle Chex Mix Bar, Nature Valley Dark Chocolate & Nut Trail Mix bar, Chocolate Marshmallow Golden Grahams Treat bar, Peanut Butter Chocolate Golden Grahams Treat

snacks, like Jalapeño Cheddar Chex Mix, typically get the strongest sales response. Keep this in mind this year when freshening your overall snack portfolio and your birthday party packages, too.

Coca-Cola news

With new varieties of Sprite, Odwalla, Full Throttle and Nestea, parent Coca-Cola is telling consumers that it is no sleeping giant. Under the Sprite banner, the company has introduced Sprite Green. Sprite Green stands out as the first sparkling (carbonated), naturally sweetened, reduced-calorie beverage in the United States. Sprite Green is made with Truvia™ natural sweetener, which has potential for use across the many brands in the Coca-Cola portfolio, if consumers give Truvia the thumbs-up sign. Expect Sprite Green to be in most markets as 2009 progresses.

Other Coca-Cola brands, too, should get reduced-calorie Truvia varieties in the months ahead. This includes the nutritional Odwalla brand, as Odwalla launches reduced-calorie Odwalla Mojito Mambo natural juice drink and Odwalla Pomegranate Strawberry natural juice drink.

Another company brand getting the go-ahead is Full Throttle Energy Drink which now includes Full Throttle Coffee. If your rink has done well or shows promise with Full Throttle, its coffee variety may be a good option during adult sessions.

Iced tea is a regular part of life with growing numbers of consumers — this holds true especially as the warm breezes of spring and summer arrive on the calendar — so Coca-Cola is meeting that need with a new Nestea version: Nestea

Red Tea Pomegranate Passion Fruit. This caffeine-free, ready-to-drink (RTD) iced tea has all-natural fruit flavors, and it was voted one of the "Top 12 Cool New Products" at the recent National Assn. of Convenience Stores trade show in Chicago. Parent Coca-Cola is revving up a major marketing program this spring for Nestea Red Tea Pomegranate Passion Fruit, which joins companion varieties Green Tea Citrus, Diet Green Tea Citrus, Iced Tea with Lemon and Diet Iced Tea with Lemon in Nestea's line-up. Time to jump on the tea bandwagon, so ask your beverage supplier for signage, promotional



The profit spotlight on Hershey, Mars, Coca-Cola, General Mills

materials, discounts and other incentives to launch Nestea Red Tea Pomegranate Passion Fruit at your rink.

Kettle snacks

The Oregon-based Kettle Brand® manufacturer of all-natural potato chips has been making its mark across the United States and beyond, and they credit innovative, tasty chip varieties for their success. (The company has chip factories in Oregon, Wisconsin and the United Kingdom, for example, to give you an idea of their reach.) Kettle Brand® potato chips have proven to be a hit with consumers, thanks to the company offering Sweet Onion, Death Val-



ley Chipotle, Backyard Barbecue, Sour Cream Onion & Chive, Buffalo Bleu, Honey Dijon, New York Cheddar, Tuscan Three Cheese and many other chip varieties, including five flavors of *baked* potato chips. Further, Kettle Brand® counts five varieties of tortilla chips, too. Contact your supplier for availability of Kettle Brand® fare in your rink market.

Disney on skates

The creative forces behind the decades of winning films from the Walt Disney empire may or may not have been at their local skating rinks, but their output certainly can find its home at *your* rink. Their ongoing video releases are ideal for redemption fare, door prizes and contest awards, and periodic Disney-themed sessions can be part of your profitable bottom line — throughout the year, but especially during school months. Now's the time to make Disney renown really work at your rink, so see about utilizing DVD and Blu-ray discs of *High School Musical 3* (and previous *HSM* installments), *Mary Poppins*, *Pinocchio*, *Bolt*, *Lilo & Stich*, *Lady and the Tramp*, *The Lion King*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* and others. Video releases later this year that should pop for you: *Jonas Brothers: Burnin' Up Concert*, *Hannah Montana: The Movie*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Race to Witch Mountain*, *The Black Cauldron: Special Edition*, and *Monsters, Inc.*, among others. Above all, look for anything connected with the Disney mega-

hit *Wall-E*. Your patrons will appreciate it and be walking and talking, as well as posting to Facebook and other Internet social sites. And, include birthday parties in your Disney plans. Anything from themed birthday parties to Disney video presents and other Disney memorabilia for party attendees and/or the birthday celebrant.

Dancing fever

The ABC-TV reality show *Danc-*

ing with the Stars continues its phenomenal run with the new season starting this spring, and that's some reality *your* rink can use. Talk with your staff to get ideas for some dancing-on-skates ideas that you can sponsor. Maybe a teen-flavored skate-dance competition, or go with dancing on skates as a theme for school sessions, or perhaps sponsor such competitions with the idea of filming the skate-dancers and putting the winners on the Internet's YouTube video-sharing Web site. And remember to call and

write your local TV stations (the ABC outlet is the natural choice) so they can get a crew out to cover your skate-dance finals. Newspapers, too, will want to send a reporter and photographer to the event. Loads of fun for everyone, and winners all around!

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Skate World of San Diego's Brett Stang stars in off-Broadway production of Xanadu

By Jan Mowle

Brett Stang isn't just a role model who is looked up to by those students he teaches to skate or by those he coaches on his roller derby team. Stang, assistant manager at Skate World in San Diego, can now add "off-Broadway star" to his resume.

In addition to deejaying, hosting skating parties, overseeing the rink on a daily basis and pitching in wherever needed, 21-year-old Stang spent most of November and December of 2008 teaching the cast to skate and taking over the part of a cast member who had been hurt.

This wasn't Stang's first foray into show business. Back in early 2008, there was a casting call for a Washington Mutual commercial up the highway at the Moonlight Roller Rink. He was given a part as an extra.

This time, however, fame came calling for him. The Broadway musical *Xanadu* had played for a year in New York and San Diego was set to be the first stop on the off-Broadway tour. The show played at the La Jolla Playhouse on the University of California at San Diego campus.

The show's stage manager called Skate World looking for a skating coach who could teach the cast members the basics of skating. Stang jumped at the chance and started off as the skating coach. He had been a jam skater for years, a type of skating that combines hip hop and break dancing. He also had taught many skaters as he grew up in dad Gary's rink and now coaches a roller derby team.

Many of the cast members in the off-Broadway production had little to no skating experience, so Stang had his work cut out for him. He taught the cast the basics of skating, including forward and backward skating, balance and control on the skate floor. He also had the opportunity to

choreograph some parts of the show.

Just being involved in that capacity would have been enough for Stang. Yet another opportunity came along that allowed him a once-in-a-lifetime experience. One of the show's stars got hurt, and since Stang already knew all of the show's numbers, he was asked to fill in for the cast member for the entire San Diego run of the production.

In his specialty skating role, Stang started out with a two-week contract and progressed from there.

"I went in for a couple of practices," Stang said, "and the next thing you know — 45 shows later — I was able to do the whole run. It's the first theatre production I've ever done.

"It was a lot of fun teaching wise," he added. "It was fun to see the cast learn quickly and bring the choreography to fruition."

Stang continued to fulfill his responsibilities at the rink during the whole show. He didn't have to show up at the theatre until it was time for his character to be on stage.

"I left the rink, got suited up and did my part," he said. "I would only really be gone about an hour each time and would have someone hold down the fort at the rink for me while I was gone. It was a little hectic and stressful, but it was well worth it!"

Stang's run in the play almost became a cast of family history repeating

itself. His dad Gary was cast in the original run of *Xanadu* a little more than 20 years ago, but passed it up to do a show in Las Vegas with Peaches & Herb and Wolfman Jack. Gary also starred in the movie "Skatetown USA" and in the television show "CHiPs."

"Because of the opportunities my dad had, he was very, very supportive and encouraged me to take this part," the younger Stang said.

Brett's greatest memory of his run with *Xanadu* was after the last show. He was asked to do a solo skate demonstration for a couple of minutes in front of the



cast and the 550-member audience.

"It was a major once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," Stang added. Though he's not actively seeking out more gigs, he said he might do something similar again if the right kind of opportunity presents itself.

Xanadu has moved on to Chicago with its touring cast. The group heads to Tokyo for four weeks following that, and Stang hopes they ask him to go along — for another life-changing experience.



HEY, RINKSIDER READERS:

It's your turn to brag! We want to know about your or your rink's "15 minutes of fame" — or any media coverage or appearances you've heard about in the industry. Send your photos and info to rinksider@rinksider.com, and we'll be sure to give you another minute or two of "roller fame"!