

'80s Nights at New Hampshire rink revive skating's appeal

By *Connie Evener*

It's, like, déjà vu on Friday nights in Enfield, N.H., where things haven't been so lively in decades. New skaters and old skaters, high school and college students, parents and small children are all flocking to Great View Roller Skating Rink for '80s Nights.

Great View's new general manager and deejay, Eric Hammond, grew up roller skating in Enfield, but hadn't skated in years – until last April. On a whim he e-mailed his list of Facebook friends, asking if they'd be interested in having an '80s reunion at the rink. Hammond then went to lunch. "When I came back an hour later, I had 150 responses," recalled Hammond. "I called the owners and half an hour later pitched the whole thing on the phone." Their response? Better yet, why not do it every Friday night!

Hammond doesn't think '80s retro is a groundbreaking idea, it's just a question of thinking "a little bit outside of the box," he said. Thanks to current movies and TV shows set in the '80s, plus encores from the period and music featured on *Guitar Hero*, "The '80s are very much 'in' right now," said Hammond. "People my age with children keep telling

them the stories of the '80s. Why tell them stories when they can come and live it?"

The Enfield Roller Rink, now known as Great View Roller Skating Rink, was built in 1977. "A lot of rinks spend a lot of money to get that kind of retro look and feel," said Hammond. "We have it already. We still have the original disco lighting, too." And today's kids are absolutely wild about the Village People's "YMCA," Toto's "Africa," Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.," the Chicken Dance, the Macarena, and the Cha-Cha Slide. Hammond is still doing double takes when he hears eight and nine-year-olds singing Cyndi Lauper tunes.

Great View's Facebook page has attracted summer camps and other private parties from the many private schools and colleges in the area. And the rink has a brand new web site (greatviewrollerskatingrink.com) with links to Facebook and Twitter. Last summer and fall, they handed out brochures at local fairs. They're doing some local newspaper advertising, and Hammond cheerleads for skating every chance he gets, from one-on-one conversations and demonstrations at local schools to public access television programs.

"There really is no downside to



A group of Dartmouth University students enjoy an '80s Night at Great View Roller Skating Rink in Enfield, N.H.

skating. It's one of the safest sports in the world and one of the most beneficial. The U. S. Olympic Committee uses it for training, for goodness sake," noted Hammond. "I just think there has to be a better alternative for children than sitting on the couch and shoving Doritos into their mouths while playing video games." Hammond and manager Elizabeth Pringle have instituted changes at the snack bar, too. They do still carry soft drinks and nachos, but kids can now choose juice drinks and granola bars, and veggie plates are on the way.

Small towns like Enfield are great places for kids to grow up, but there is a downside, said Hammond. "There's really no place to go to get away from mom and dad and have fun and be safe. Skating rinks are the original social network."

Hammond's own daughter, Shea, who had never skated until last spring, has blossomed at the rink. "Now she can do helicopter moves, dance skate, and she's an honorary floor guard," said Hammond. As a matter of fact, each week he presents "Shea's Skater of the Day Award," along with a free pass, to first time skaters, "who, no matter how many times they've fallen

down, keep getting up and persevering and end up having a great time."

Hammond and Pringle have come up with some new birthday party packages, with the accent on helping parents by providing absolutely everything so parents can be part of the party itself, "on the inside, rather than on the outside looking in," as Hammond put it. "One of the best things we do is have the birthday boy or girl come up to my deejay booth, and for three songs, they're in charge. They get to pick the music, they get to talk on the mike, they get to play with the strobe lights," said Hammond. Talk about instilling a feeling of ownership...

Hammond and Pringle do everything they can to make every skater feel comfortable, and as though the rink belongs to them, too. "We remember everybody's name, everybody's favorite songs, everybody's favorite food," said Hammond. He and Pringle stand at the door as each session ends to say thank you to every customer as they leave. "If I have to stand on my head to get people to have a good time – and come back – I'll do it. And I've done it. And I'll do it again."

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