

Tennessee rink owner brings fun, community to small town with 'Olympic' style games

By Suzy Weinland

While the world's top athletes have their moment in the spotlight in the 2012 Summer Olympics, skaters at Paris Wheels in Paris, Tenn., are getting ready to showcase their athletic – and non-athletic – prowess redneck style!

The Redneck Olympics Back to School Blast at Paris Wheels was designed for skaters and non-skaters alike and included an evening of wacky events that rink owner Jennifer McFarland tagged as the perfect ending to summer break.

"Our games are very family friendly and include things like the cow chip toss, armpit serenade, corn cob relay and watermelon eating contest," shared McFarland, who with her husband and two business partners purchased the rink in late 2010 after it was closed for six years.

She did give credit for the ideas to their sister rink, Magic Wheels, in Milan, Tenn., who did a similar event last Thanksgiving, and the annual Redneck Olympics held in Atlanta, Ga. She also incorporated some interesting items leftover from the previous owner of Paris Wheels (then called Paris on Wheels).

"They left 2 by 12 boards with wheels on them that skaters would sit on and use plungers to roll across the skate floor – plunger rolling. They also did human bowling – a child on skates, in a squatted position, holding their knees is pushed by another person on skates and they roll across the floor and knock down 'pins.' Our pins are made from pickle jars."

McFarland said such events as the armpit serenade, the plunger rolling and the watermelon-eating contest – that took place in the easy-to-clean party area – are perfect for those not comfortable with wearing roller skates.

As we interviewed McFarland, she was busy experimenting with making "cow chips" out of foam insulation, sawdust and brown spraypaint. "This way the kids won't have issues with picking them up or tossing them. They toss them at targets on the floor and accumulate points from each target they hit."

Students returned to school in Paris, Tenn., on Monday, Aug. 6, so the Redneck Olympics took place on Friday, August 3 from 6:30 pm—midnight. Pre-registered teams were given VIP entry to the rink at 6 pm to review event schedule and procedures, and each skater had to pay \$10 plus skate rental.

Each team of four competed

throughout the evening in various events to accumulate points for overall team standings. Points were also awarded for the best display of team spirit. "I encouraged teams to come up with a flag or uniform for the opening ceremony parade."



Participants in the 'Red Neck Olympics' roll tires at Paris Wheels, Paris, Tenn.

And during closing ceremonies, medals on camouflage ribbon were awarded to the top three in each event as well as the top three teams.

In organizing the event, McFarland made sure the night incorporated the right mix of "Olympic" games and roller skating, so that everyone would have a chance to participate in a variety of activities. When asked about music selection, she said since a lot of country music includes lyrics about drinking and partying, which she doesn't promote in her rink or in her own life, she would probably just use Promo Only selections they use regularly that had already been checked for appropriate lyrics.

As for food, she chuckled, saying that her concessions area already serves corn dogs and picklesicles, among other fare that could be deemed redneck appropriate, so she wasn't going to make anything special.

In addition to the Redneck Olympics, Paris Wheels offers several other regular events that in the short eighteen months they have been open have become very popular with locals.

In the fall, during football season, Paris Wheels holds Friday night Overtime skate sessions. It is for younger kids "who don't want to go home, but they can't go and hang out with their big brothers and sisters," explained McFarland. Overtimes go until midnight.

Every March, Paris Wheels hosts a Diaper Drive for the local pregnancy center. "Throughout the month, we give any skater who donates a package of diapers a coupon for a free skate during our Spring Break skate sessions. If they

wait until the night of the skate, they can also bring a pack of diapers and get in free." McFarland shared that many kids wanted to participate, but didn't want to be seen carrying diapers, so they'd make their parents come in with them. "It was

recently orderd LED roller lights to sell with wheels after her skate guard told her they are the newest, hippest trend for roller skating.

"We wanted to keep the rink as close to original as possible, but pump it up a bit. We painted and added glow-in-the-dark carpet, but I wanted to keep the nostalgia since the rink had been closed and I knew there were a lot of people in the community that skated here as children and would come in and want some of it to be the same," said McFarland, who happened to skate at the rink when it first opened in 1980.

"Because our community is so small, we are open Friday, Saturday and Sunday." Those days also incorporate birthday parties, School's Out Beach Party day, occasional late nights 'til midnight, said McFarland. "We tried Thursday family nights for a few months when we were new and things were crazy busy, but soon it kind of died out.

"The community has been so supportive and excited," said McFarland regarding re-opening the rink. "They say, 'The kids needed something, we're so glad you re-opened.' We still love every minute of it."

quite funny to see."

ParisWheels also has a hardwood maple floor, six-seat concession area and a skate wall that includes a variety of skates and accessories. McFarland

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