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RINKSIDER

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Where the good times roll in Michigan.....p.9

Dixie Skateland has been providing fun for its customers for more than 50 years. Read about the several generations who have helped this business survive and thrive through the decades.

Epic Rollertainment coming to California.....p. 13

A truly "epic" theme for a California rink. Check out the unique decor and theme for a new rink that embraces the "weird" of Southern California.

The fight against eminent domain.....p.15

Find out how one rink owner successfully fought off an attempt to use eminent domain to take his business.

Visiting roller skating rinks across America.....p.18

One of our writers recently moved cross country. As she, her husband and the family pets drove from Delaware to Arizona, they did a photo documentary of rinks they visited along the way. See the photos and read her helpful tips regarding signage and exteriors that will give your business an edge in attracting out-of-town customers.

High-end sound, lighting and décor choices pay off handsomely for two rinks

By Catherine Bennett

Mike Couey's business is proof that investing in the details pays off long term.

If you take the LED lights, the fluorescent murals and the high-quality sound system out of Starlite Family Fun Center in Atlanta, Ga.,

what's left is far from memorable. Couey, manager and co-owner of Starlite Family Fun Centers, said he guarantees he wouldn't have 30 percent of the customers he has if he hadn't splurged a little on new technology. He and his brother Clint Couey, along with their mother Angela Williams, have been in the business together for 23 years.

After assessing their failures and successes, they came to this conclusion: creating an energetic, inviting atmosphere begins with lighting and sound.

"You can't compare rinks that haven't spent the money to those that have," Couey said. "Walking into our rinks is night-and-day different from walking into a place that hasn't spent the money. You can't compare it; it's like comparing Disneyland to Chuck E. Cheese's."

Perhaps the best part of Couey's lighting system is that it's paired with dozens of captivating, 3-D murals. This means many customers spend their evenings at Starlite wearing 3-D glasses to get the full effect of the lighting and wall art. Couey hired an artist who specializes in using glow-in-the-dark paint. This artist made the scenes he painted recognizable to Georgia natives. One painting depicts an image of Philips Stadium—where the Atlanta Hawks play—being taken over by aliens. On another wall there is a painting of a crystal ball, but the woman inside appears closer than she truly is. This same effect is seen in a painting of a roller coaster. The thrill seekers in the painting are coming right at you.

"The artist I brought in did the 3-D cutouts with foam, then painted them with the black light paint," Couey said. "When the black lights hit the paintings, some of them look like they are on fire on the wall."

Make sure images on the walls aren't done to resemble graffiti, Couey said, because that look often drives people away; it sends the wrong message.

The novelty atmosphere Couey creates with these murals would all be for naught had he picked the less expensive road when installing lights. Purchasing quality LED lights, both black lights and colored lights, for every fixture is the key to giving any skating rink a fresh, high-quality feel. It's also the key to making



Skaters at Starlite Family Fun Center in Atlanta, Ga., bounce to the new sound system.

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Georgia and Texas operators share their most popular and successful floor games

By Kathy Bergstrom

Rink owners who want their games to be successful must be creative and thoughtful at the same time – offering

games that are competitive and fun but that will be appropriate for the skaters attending that particular session, rink owners say.

"You got to have a good repertoire of games and know which ones will work best"

for which sessions, said Kenny Cook, owner of three Georgia skating rinks, all called Fun Galaxy.

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Sound and light (cont'd from page 1)

any wall designs pop.

"The LED lights are so bright it cuts the number of lighting fixtures you need to purchase in half," Couey said.

Those who witness Starlite's memorable light show often relate the experience to being in a space ship. For those with less of an imagination, Couey said his light show resembles those found at large concert arenas.

Making his rink even more high-tech, Couey controls all of the lighting and sound in the palm of his hand. He uses an application similar to PC Anywhere, which syncs a personal computer and phone. Couey uses the smart phone application Remote to control iTunes from any location inside the rink.

To ensure that his customers experience pure and explosive sound, Couey trusts Audio Sound equipment. He said it is impossible to blow out the speakers. As a

rink owner, the last thing you want to worry about is technical difficulties with the sound system. If music isn't playing, customers will begin filing out of the building.

"We have really high-end quality speakers," Couey said. "If you are going to be in this business and drive it 12 hours a day like we do, you need a good speaker system. Put more money in at the beginning. Yes, the upfront cost is more, but you'll see better results in the end."

As for his music equipment, Couey relies on All-American DJ, a company offering high-quality products that are easy to set up. In fact, Couey was able to install his DJ system on his own.

"I've seen kids walk through the doors and their mouths drop, the parents' mouths drop too," Couey said. "The rink was designed perfectly. Everyone is blown away. I call it the Disney effect. It makes all the effort worth it."

Georgia and Texas rinks (cont'd from page 1)

Acquiring and adding to that repertoire of games requires brainstorming, learning from other rink owners and just watching the way kids play, Cook said. But successful game time also means offering games that appeal to as many people as possible attending the session, he noted.

"We try to do games that will be skating type games and non-skating type games," he said. The rink also makes sure to get moms and dads involved in games on birthday party days and family skate days so they'll have fun and want to bring their kids back.

It's important to incorporate an element of competition and excitement when planning and organizing games for the older kids who skate during Friday night sessions, said Jimbo Hafner, owner of Silver Wings Ballroom in Brenham, Texas.

Cook agreed. "We have to understand that for certain age groups, if you're not doing something that's borderline unsafe, they don't want to do it," he said.

"Kids like to compete," Hafner said. "It's their chance to show off that they are better than somebody else whether that be in a race or Pac Man (a rink game)," he said.

Hafner has found that any type of tag game is popular with older kids while classics like the Limbo or the Hokey Pokey continue to work for younger skaters. "We vary it by session, depending on the age group. The games we play Friday night, we may do several chase type games, where we could never do that on a Saturday," he said.

Pitting boys against the girls is another great idea, Hafner said.

Cook also likes to do games that have girls competing against boys and often tries to slant the games toward a victory for the female crowd. The girls love it, and the boys get mad, but it's all in good fun, he said.

Making game time exciting requires more than selecting the right contests, Cook said. Rinks must have a DJ who is skilled at directing the games and interacting and joking with the skaters.

"Some people, you have to force fun on them, they can't have fun on their own," Cook said. "You've got to be the fun factory, you've got to be the entertainment director,"



Skaters at Fun Galaxy in Decatur, Ga., participate in a "snowball" fight.

he said.

Sound effects and music also add to the entertainment value.

At Fun Galaxy rinks, skaters will be signaled that a game or a race is about to start with particular sound effects or songs. Before the races, it might be Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train" or Van Halen's "Jump." Before a game starts, skaters might hear Fred Flintstone's "Yabba Dabba Doo" or the Superman movie theme.

"It kind of gets people's attention, adds a little flavor to what you're doing short of just stopping the music," Cook said.

During the mystery word game, you might hear a mysterious sounding song, and during the judging period for the Dead Bug game, you'll hear the theme from Jeopardy. Rink owners can find the sound effects on a sound effects CD, but Cook suggested that rink owners do their homework and figure out which selection will work best for particular games.

Hafner and Cook offered these examples of popular games at their rinks:

Tag games:

Pac Man – The game starts with three or four "Pac Men" in the middle of the rink with foam noodles (typically used for swimming) called Pac Man paddles. When the siren goes off, Pac Men leave the center area and try to tag everyone before the song "Pac Man Fever" ends. Skaters must skate around the center of the floor,

trying to avoid getting tagged with one of the noodles. Those who are tagged are out of the game and must leave the floor.

Jail Break – Skaters gather in a corner that's sectioned off with pylons – "the jail." The jailers have the same paddles used for Pac Man and start off on the opposite end of the rink. The siren blows, and both the jailers and skaters take off. The jailers try to tag the skaters with their paddles. Skaters who get tagged aren't out but have to go to jail. Another siren signals a jail break and the jailed skaters take off again. The jailers drop their paddles and get all new jailers.

Other games:

Wipeout – Skaters skate to "Wipeout" by the Surfaris. When the DJ says "wipeout," everyone has to sit down on the skate floor. Skaters are divided into teams, typically girls vs. boys, and the last person to sit down each time loses a point for their team. The game is usually played until one team reaches five points. "The girls win 90 percent of the time," Hafner said.

Dead Bug Game – When the music stops, skaters drop down to the floor and act like a dead bug. A judge awards prize tickets to the skaters who look most like a dead bug. Cook said it's a popular game for younger kids.

Balloon pop relay – Inflate 15 to 20 balloons and place them on one end of the floor. Split skaters into two teams on the opposite end of the floor. One skater from

disco days.

Schorlee opened Let's Sk8 with her sisters, and together they selected colorful laser lighting to create the old school feel they were looking for. Customers often gasp at the moving lights on the walls and rink floor, Schorlee said. As if the dozens of laser lights aren't enough, customers are encouraged to wear disco-inspired getups, which often mean flashing, sparkling lights are part of their ensembles.

"We create a different experience this way," Schorlee said. "It becomes boring just skating and that is why we have done what we have. You get to dress up and laugh at your friends."

One of Let's Sk8's most important investments is their resident DJ. The DJ makes sure to keep up-to-date on new, popular music to keep sessions fresh for the kids. In fact, the DJ's music database is updated on a weekly basis.



Guests at Fun Galaxy keep the hula hoop moving for a chance to win prizes.

each team races up to a balloon and sits on it until it pops. The team member then skates back to the team, and the next team member skates to the balloons and pops one. The team that pops the most balloons in the allotted time wins.

Non-skating games (also good for involving moms and dads):

Balloon pop contest – Participants receive a balloon. When the music starts, participants blow on the balloons until they pop. The first – often the first three kids and the first three adults – to pop their balloons receive a prize.

Snowball fight – This game also can be played with skates. Divide the rink in half using orange safety cones, and divide skaters into two teams. Put several rolls of toilet paper on each side. When the music starts, teams start throwing toilet paper back and forth across the cones. The goal is to get the biggest amount of toilet paper on the other team's side during the time allotted.

Good for birthday parties:

Pump 'em up – All of the birthday kids gather on the skate floor wearing extra large T-shirts. All of the birthday party guests and parents gather around their birthday child with 10 balloons. They blow the balloons up and put them inside the child's T-shirt. "The kids look like the Stay Puff Marshmallow Man," Cook said. The winner is determined by crowd applause.