

Skaters sing praise for Christian-based events at two N.Y. rinks

By Kathy Bergstrom

Two New York roller skating rinks say offering a Christian-themed skating session once a month provides an opportunity to connect to the community as well as reach new skaters.

United Skates of America in Seaford, Long Island, N.Y. offers a Gospel Skate Night the first Friday of every month, typically from 9:30 p.m. to midnight. Several rinks in the United Skates of America chain offer Christian skates.

At the Seaford rink, the Christian skating session includes a live gospel D.J. The rink bills it as an “evening of fellowship, family and fun,” said Lauren Fink, the rink’s sales manager.

The rink changes the session each month to offer varying perks. One night it might be all you can eat pizza, and another night it might be reduced prices.

At Christmas time the session includes a canned food drive. At Halloween, the rink also offers a Hallelujah Night, which is the rink’s largest church event of the year, drawing 300 to 400 skaters, Fink said. The event also includes a live gospel D.J. and no costumes are permitted.

Each year the rink’s calendar includes the Christian skating session with the special events. The sessions are marketed as an open skate for different churches and usually draw 250 to 400 skaters, Fink said.

In August, the rink planned an all you can eat pizza night, which cost \$12 including admission, skate rental and unlimited pizza and soda.

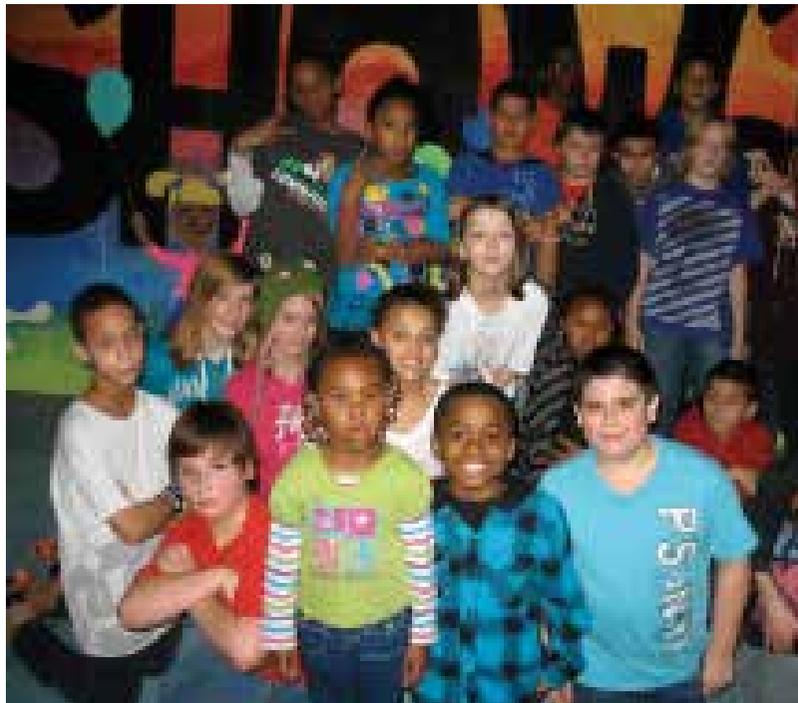
September’s session had a back-to-school theme and offered free admission with \$4 skate rental. In October, the rink planned another all you can eat pizza night. November’s session is billed as “Raise the Praise,” and is marketed to youth groups. Cost is \$10 and includes admission, skate rental, a slice of pizza and small soda.

“We call a lot of the churches about a month prior to each event and let them know about the upcoming special gospel skate night,” Fink said.

The churches then reserve spots for skaters, and the rink sends the churches tickets for the event. The churches pay a deposit and collect the money from their members.

Fink estimated the rink has held the Christian skates for four to five years.

“It’s a great evening for the churches. Families come together,” Fink said. “It gives them a physical



Local children of various ages enjoy Christian skate sessions on the third Sunday of each month at Showtime Skating in Watertown, N.Y.

activity for the church and a great outing for the children.”

Because different churches attend each month, the rink is exposed to new people, who ideally return for other regular sessions, Fink said.

United Skates of America also adds to its marketing push by choosing two churches of the month each month and offers the discounted admission to the gospel skate night that month.

Seaford is a community of nearly 16,000 people, and the sessions draw skaters from the area and as far away as Queens, which is about a 45-minute drive, Fink said.

Showtime Skating in Watertown, N.Y., a city of about 27,000 people near the state’s border with Canada, has experimented with offering Christian skate sessions. The rink, which opened two years ago, offered the sessions every Sunday initially but is now offering them once per month.

Owner Isaac Alexis III said he offered the Christian skates both as a service to the Christian community and to widen the rink’s appeal.

Showtime Skating’s Christian skating session is held from 5 to 7 p.m. on the third Sunday of the month with a cost of \$5, including skate rental.

Alexis invites skaters to bring their own Christian-based music to the sessions to be played along with the rink’s music.

Alexis is a Christian and said he knows many people who don’t want to listen to non-Christian music and wanted them to have an opportunity to enjoy skating at the rink.

which features musical performances by performers from local churches. Showtime has a 24-foot wide stage lit with more than 60 lights. The Gospel Explosion draws up to 300 people and does not include skating.

In addition, Showtime also hosts a Bible study group weekly Wednesday nights and shows a Christian movie on Thursday nights.

In addition to a flyer, Showtime promotes its Christian skating session in a group e-mail to local ministers and pastors.

Showtime opened after Watertown was without a skating rink for about 15 to 20 years, which means the rink has missed a whole generation of skaters, Alexis noted. That’s why it’s important to offer non skating events to reach more customers, he said.

Although it’s not Christian-based, on one Sunday per month Showtime features musical performances by local youths. The other two Sundays are spent rehearsing for the performance, and Alexis provides a critique for the young acts.

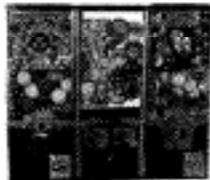
“Every time we look up, we’re trying to find a way to bring people here,” he said. “It’s more advertisement for the business. All of it ties in together.”

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