

Georgia rink owners increase revenue with soft playgrounds

By Dionne Obeso

Imagine your rink doors opening and the customers pouring in. The adults are sneaking off for some fun and adventure in the laser tag arena, the teens are already zoning out in the arcade, and the pre-teens are

the whole family want to come. Adults might not want to skate, but they might want to play a game of laser tag with their kids.”

Their renovation included the painful but very worthy removal of some of their rink floors, shortening them to 170 sq. ft. by 80 sq. ft. in Hiram and 160 sq. ft. by 80 sq.

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tying on their skates. Where do the youngest kids fit into your rink or family entertainment center? For Ava Couey, an owner of two Sparkles Roller Skating Rinks in Hiram and Kennesaw, Ga., the answer is the soft-play playground.

Sparkles has been “selling fun” in the Atlanta, Ga., area since 1959. The family-owned rink empire has expanded to include four rinks in the state, two of which are owned by Couey and her husband. “We decided to put the first playground in at Hiram about 3 or 4 years ago,” Couey said. “It was such a great investment that we put the one at Kennesaw in a year later.”

The installation of the playgrounds was a part of a much larger renovation to take the old rinks, which housed little more than a tiny café and a skate floor, into competition with modern attractions. “There are too many places now that offer a lot more competition, so you have to have enough things to make

ft. in Kennesaw. Couey would not change a thing now that it is done. “A roomier café is much better than the huge floor,” she said.

Let’s talk money

Couey said that the soft-play systems cost about \$120 thousand to install, and they’ve increased revenue substantially. “We are getting much younger groups buying birthday party packages than ever before; I would encourage anyone to install a playground. We talk about what we would do if we built another rink, and we know we would always build a playground.”

The Sparkles rinks at Hiram and Kennesaw have a wide range of features, so the rinks charge admission based on the number of attractions that guests want to explore. Their features include the skate floor, a laser tag arena, the playground and an arcade area (buying the arcade area as a feature gives you

extra tokens).

One of the great things about the playground is that it can attract so many more people. Couey encourages her employees to suggest the playground to parents checking in their older kids for other activities. “The playground is pay-to-play and increases revenue, especially for the toddlers, because we can tell parents that there are special areas for the small kids, too,” she said.

The playground feature

Couey and her husband chose the PlaySmart system for their rinks because it is designed to be a “soft” playground, making it easier and more comfortable for kids to move around. The system does not use hard plastic tubes, but instead employs mesh webbing made of a material much like seatbelts. The fabric is strong, durable, and easy to clean, making it perfect for kids.

There are stations and challenges built right into the system. The playgrounds from PlaySmart are fully custom-

izable, allowing you to choose the activities and design of your playground based on the space you have available.

Couey chose to include a separate toddler area for the smallest kids. It has features created by PlaySmart specifically for their age range, and has a separate entrance so that big kids can’t wander in.

The age limit for playing on the playground at both Sparkles rinks is 10 years old. “We used to allow kids up to age 12 in, but it is so much easier for a 13 or 14 year old to pass as a 12 year old than it is for a 12 year old to pass for a 10 year old. We were getting a lot of older kids and teenagers in the playground, and they tend to do more damage.” Couey said.

To further promote safety, the employee at the playground entrance both checks kids for wristbands and monitors the playground. There is a video monitor at that station that allows the employee to watch hard-to-see places on the playground via camera.



The addition of a multi-level softplay system has dramatically increased birthday party bookings for Sparkles in Hiram, Ga.

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