

# Neville Rollerdrome celebrates 65 years of roller skating in Pa.

By Suzy Weinland

**N**eville Rollerdrome, located on Neville Island in the middle of the Ohio River, about seven miles outside of Pittsburgh, Pa., has always been a family-run and family-centered roller skating rink.

Built in 1948, Neville Rollerdrome will mark the beginning of 65 years in business on November 23, 2012. While the ownership has changed hands in the past year, the former owners are reported to have been the longest-running owners/operators in the history of roller skating rinks.

The Deramo brothers – Anthony (Tony), Victor (Vic) and Dan – built the rink, including the maple floor that still stands today. Their mother, affectionately referred to by customers as “grandma,” sold tickets at the rink. Tony passed away in 2010, Vic is now 88, and “little brother” Dan recently turned 76.

Neville’s family-friendly tradition continues on with new owners Jim and Sophie Parks, who purchased the rink from the Deramo family in July 2011.

“I grew up here. This is my 42nd year as a roller skater,” shared Jim. “My parents met roller skating and taught skating at a different rink. But we came to this rink because it was closest to our home when I was little.” Jim added that his wife has skated for 20 years, their adult children skate, and Jim’s

75-year-old mom, Donna, still skates.

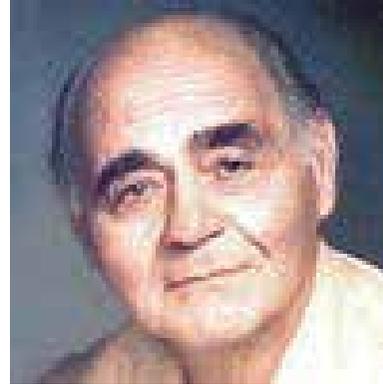
“We have three generations of skaters in our family. We provide a safe, fun, family environment and focus on skating.” Son Jon runs the skating games, and daughter Marie will soon try out for Pittsburgh’s Steel City Women’s Roller Derby team.

Jim explained that they do not have video games, or any additional attractions. Patrons skate on the 16,540 sq. ft. floor, which includes a promenade with benches along the front and sides. According to Jim, the original floor was 30 feet shorter, but the extra length was added in the early 1950s, and it’s level within a half inch after 64 years.

The Parks’ goal is to rebuild roller skating. “Our mission is to become the skating center of Southwestern Pennsylvania. I’m not sure what that looks like, exactly, but we want people to associate roller skating in all forms, with us.”

Neville Rollerdrome offers practice times for clubs and builds and sells custom and stock skates from a variety of distributors. “We do speed races and are in the process of measuring off the rink for a 90-meter track because we’re looking to form an informal speed club here. We are also working with the Steel City women’s roller derby team in conjunction with the Jr. Roller Derby Association.”

In addition to the skate clubs, Neville runs a good, old-fashioned business that includes a snack bar that seats 30, one party



**Anthony (Tony) Deramo was one of three brothers who built, owned and worked at Neville Rollerdrome for 63 years. Tony worked the skate room and passed away in February, 2010, at age 88.**

room that seats 20 and is used for birthdays and private rentals, and a rental area with 773 pairs of quads and 200 inlines. “The teens are still using them. Most of our rentals on Friday and Saturday nights are inlines,” said Parks.

Families make up the majority of skaters on the first session each Friday and Saturday. The second session includes more teens and older skaters. On a good night, Jim said they see about 100-125 skaters over the course of an evening, with about 45 staying over from the first session.

Every Tuesday night they still have

dance skating with organ music. “We only have a couple dozen skaters who come, but we still do it. Marty Dumick, and organist who played here in the ‘70s, still plays here. We draw ages in the mid-to-upper 40s all the way up to the 70 and 80-year-olds.

The building is retro-‘70s décor. “But, we like the feel,” shared Parks. “People walk in and we hear, ‘wow, it’s just as I remember.’ So we’re capitalizing on that memory. Now they bring their kids back and start skating more.”

Jim and Sophie Parks also see the rink as a mission. The rink is situated in an industrial area where they pull customers from Pittsburgh as well as surrounding suburbs. “We’re Christian and we’ve been married 20 years. We see kids coming into the city, and we may be the only stable marriage that they see, or the only adults that listen to them because sometimes that’s all they want is for somebody to listen to them,” said Jim. “So, if we can be positive...this is part of what motivates my wife and I.”

The Parks’ make sure everyone feels at home at their rink. “My wife and I get out on the floor and skate. We walk our promenades and talk to people, and give them a shout out on Facebook. If you walk in the front door of my rink, you are part of my family. It’s a labor of love.”