

# ROLLING *along*

By Chester Fried



**Long-time roller skating enthusiast Chester Fried is the vice president and a founder of the The National Museum of Roller Skating. We count on him at the Rinksideer to help keep readers current.**

The following article is presented here through the efforts of Chester Fried. The article is taken from the book "Titans and Heroes of American Roller Skating," written by George Pickard. It is re-written here as a tribute to Marvin Facher, who passed away at the age of 92, with the gracious permission of the author. The book is available through the Museum of Roller Skating in Lincoln, Neb.

## The history behind America On Wheels

By Marvin Facher  
Short Hills, New Jersey

The concept for an America on Wheels chain of roller skating rinks along the East Coast originated in 1937 with the visit of William Schmitz, an operator of a small roller rink in New Jersey, to the offices of Joseph Facher and his partner/brother-in-law Morris Kanengiser, whose firm was involved with real estate investments. Working through a mutual business acquaintance, Schmitz suggested that they collectively invest in building roller skating rinks as affordable public recreation during those dark days of the Great Depression. Facher and Kanengiser looked into this possibility and concluded that roller skating rinks might just be a good investment and were willing to initiate a trial investment. A partnership was formed with other investors, none of whom would own more than 20 percent of the stock. Since none of the partners were familiar with rink operation, other than Schmitz, he was made general manager of operations.

The first rink opened to test the business plan's validity was the conversion of an existing structure in Mount Vernon, N.Y. in 1940. The rink quickly proved very successful. The partners decided to reinvest all accrued profits into construction of more rinks. The AOW's second rink was the Boulevard Arena in Bayonne, N.J., which was completed later in that same year. This was all new construction, with a modern exterior and interior designed for roller skating and to appeal to those with the highest standards for recreation. Next was the Capitol Arena in Trenton, N.J. and then the Twin City Arena in Elizabeth, N.J., where the executive offices of the organization were housed. The AOW rink chain continued to expand into the 1950s, reaching a total of 12 rinks under the America on Wheels banner in the states of New York, New Jersey, Vir-

ginia, Maryland and Washington, D. C.

The company's business plan included careful research for each new location to assure the success of a prospective venture and then to invest enough in construction of the facility to offer the public the finest recreational center in the area. Some AOW rinks were built at a cost of \$1,500,000 in 1950 dollars, perhaps three times the average large rink investment of the day. Nearly every location quickly justified its investment by providing the public with healthy and attractive venues for their roller skating pleasure at modest cost.

In 1942, the America on Wheels rinks, under the direction of William Schmitz, supported Mineola, New York rink operator Earl Van Horn with his formation of the United Rink Operators association after Van Horn's defection from the Board of Control of the RSROA. Schmitz became secretary of the URO, as well as Chairman of its Information Bureau. Van Horn was Chairman of the URO publications committee, which in the Spring of 1946 produced the first issue of the magazine "The American Roller Skater," which declared it was the "official publication of the USARSA." In 1957 the Facher and Kanengiser families bought out their partners in the AOW rinks. As a result of the subsequent reorganization, William Schmitz was replaced as Operating Manager of America on Wheels; and Marvin Facher, son of founder Joseph Facher, took over as the managing partner with his cousin Marvin Kanengiser, son of Morris Kanengiser assisting with the day-to-day operations. Marvin Facher was prepared for the responsibility, as he had been employed in AOW administration since his release from the US Army in 1947. The AOW rinks continued to support USARSA skating clubs in nearly all their rinks and were frequently hosts for USARSA state and national competitions.

In 1970 Marvin Facher entered discussions with RSROA leaders for the disbanding of the URO in favor of rink operator unity again under the aegis of the RSROA. At the same time, Facher agreed to help broker a reconciliation between his AOW clubs, the USARSA and the RSROA amateur group if common agreement could be found in both programs that would facilitate participation in a joint national championship and USA success with international Competitions under FIRS. Such a merger was accomplished in 1972, and Facher brought all his remaining URO affiliated rinks into the RSROA as members and

their respective clubs affiliated with the newly merged amateur coalition under the new name US Amateur Confederation of Roller Skating.

With the merger, Marvin Facher became a member of the RSROA Board



Marvin Facher(right) with his long time friend Michael Fieger

of Directors and later in 1979 was elected to the first of two terms as President of the RSROA. During his administration, he was most proud of the introduction of two women onto the RSROA Board, "breaking the glass ceiling for an industry where mom and pop rink operation was most common, and with mom frequently being the chief operating partner." During his RSROA Presidency in 1980, Marvin Facher facilitated the founding of the National Museum of Roller Skating by advocating financial support from the RSROA to fund its start-up and residency costs within the RSROA Headquarters.

In 1988 Marvin Facher was made a Life Member of the RSROA in recognition of his service to the industry, for the pioneering aspects of his multiple rink operations and for his accomplishments as RSROA President. He has continued his personal support for the Museum for over 30 years as a member of its Board of Trustees and as a contributing patron.

In 1986, Facher looked around family circles for someone to assume the reins of the AOW operations. Finding no one either qualified or available, the two families elected to sell the real estate, providing as much notice and support as possible

for loyal managers and rink personnel. As the individual properties were liquidated, a number did remain as skating rinks for a time; but for America on Wheels, its glory years had come and gone after a half century of operation as a pioneering group of premier roller skating facilities.

## Joe Enthor defies gravity

Longtime competitive roller skater, skating teacher and rink manager of the Depew Skating Center in New York Joe Enthor has a fabulous YouTube site and DVD of his Learn To Skate lessons. You can get it online at [www.Facebook.Com/rollerskatewithjoe](http://www.Facebook.Com/rollerskatewithjoe).

So far Joe has 790 Subscribers and 214,000 Views to his YouTube Channel. The name of his DVD is Defying Gravity. Joe demonstrates all items from first steps on wheels to advanced items such as a Camel Spin and a Shoot The Duck.

## New rink openings abound

Many new and refurbished rinks are opening for business!

The Lake Arbutus Pavilion rink in Hatfield, Wis., has reopened after burning to the ground in January 2011. It's now restored and they expect a great season.

In Mammoth Lakes, Calif., a multi-use facility that includes the New Monmouth Roller Rink - an outdoor 17,000 sq. ft. venue - opened June 8th. It's owned and operated by the Township. Operating in the winter as an ice rink, the Mammoth Roller Rink will offer roller in-line skating, youth hockey, plus arena soccer, broomball, basketball, mini ramps, tennis and golf.

In Mundelein, Ill., the former Hot Wheels Roller rink has re-opened. The 1930's era rink is operated by Lisa Duncan and Toby Tagliapietra. The new name is "Just For Fun 2." Best of luck to them.

Stockton, Calif., has just been reunited with roller skating. The new indoor Stockton Sports Complex offers roller hockey, a women's roller derby team, indoor soccer and volleyball. The vast floor can accommodate three volleyball games at once.

A total of four new rinks are opening in the United Kingdom. Let's SK8 opened last year in the Patchway Sports Center. Now that they are doing so well they have opened three new Roller Disco rinks in Weston-Super-Mare, City Academy and Knowle. Managers Nicola Schorlee and Sharon Black said "Let's SK8 is now one year old and we are extremely pleased with the growth the we have experienced within this period".