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RSA history book a good summer read..p. 7

If you or someone you know is a roller skating rink history buff, then you'll want to get your hands on the new book entitled *Our Story: Roller Skating Association International*, available only through the National Museum of Roller Skating. See page 7 for details.

Meet and greet via cell phone.....p.15

Want a new way to reach your customers and their friends with coupons and promotional offers via their smartphones? Then read Joe Dysart's in-depth article on the newest marketing opportunity called 'foursquare,' being offered by free GPS-driven social networks.

Food, glorious rink food.....p. 17

Operators in California and North Dakota have found their customers' hot buttons. Mini donuts, Philly Cheese Steak sandwiches and more are creating a buzz at their snack bars and keeping customers, especially the parents and young adults, coming back for more.

Unique flooring makes two Oklahoma rinks stand out from the pack

By Kathy Bergstrom

Skaters wondering what makes two Oklahoma City area roller skating rinks stand out from the rest need to look no further than their logos.

"The Bumps" and "Glow Floor" are incorporated into the emblems of Southwestern Skate Center in Oklahoma City and Skate Moore Skate Center in nearby Moore. Both rinks are owned by Janet Hardridge and Laird Crowe, and their unique skating surfaces are a marketing tool, Hardridge said.

The Bumps are a set of five bumps, similar to large speed bumps you might find in a parking lot, spread over about 70 feet at the south end of the rink at Southwestern Skate Center in Oklahoma City. Hardridge and Crowe bought the rink in 1991.

The glow floor at Skate Moore Skate Center takes on a bluish purplish haze when the black lights come on. The partners acquired that rink, located about 4.5 miles away from Southwestern Skate Center, in 2002.

Built in the late 1960s, Southwestern Skate Center originally had a concrete floor

and had the bumps, which were unique, Hardridge said. "It was very progressive for the '60s," she noted.

She's been told the only other rink with bumps like those at the Oklahoma City rink is in Hawaii.

The new owners covered the concrete floor with a used hard rock maple rotunda floor about 13 years ago. The

bumps remain concrete, because the wood could not be bent to cover them.

Although they are on the rink's south end near the snack bar, the bumps skating surface is separated by a curved concrete block wall painted with a sign signifying "The Bumps." Skaters can choose to enter

continued on page 34



The 1960s floor "bumps" are still a hit with skaters at Southwestern Skate Center in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Multiple-rink ownership: A rewarding juggling act

By Catherine Bennett

Rink owners managing and operating one rink may think they have their hands full, but other rink owners who operate three or four rinks prove that taking

on this challenge only amplifies the excitement they find in their work.

Not only are these traveling rink owners able to keep their promotions, staff and facilities in order, they continue to enhance the quality of their customers' family-fun

experiences. Some owners have their business mapped out in two different states, and others have their centers strategically placed in nearby towns.

"When you have two rinks, you can run in-between, but you run yourself to death," said Bobby Bentley, owner of rinks in Ala., Ga. and Fla. "Three rinks seems to be the magic number. It allows you to be able to hire maintenance people, full-time secretaries; you can afford to do that. Four rinks repeats this same thing, and it starts to get even easier."

A major factor in successfully managing multiple rinks at a time is being able to afford the man power to disperse the work load, Bentley said. Luckily, Bentley's son is in the rink operating business as well, he said, and is his right-hand man. He is a partial owner of their two largest rinks near Birmingham, Ala., and Atlanta, Ga.



Skaters get ready to race "gators" at an event at one of Bobby Bentley's three rinks.

continued on page 34

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Multiple rinks (cont'd from page 1)

Although these rinks are under careful management, Bentley said he values maintaining a stream of constant communication between the rinks he visits less often, and schedules mandatory meetings twice a year that require all four rinks' managers to attend.

"Communication is the key to successful operations," said Jeff Couey, owner and operator of Georgia's Sparkles Family Fun Centers. "Since we have strived to mirror each store it creates a uniform approach, both to the physical building, and the operational and technological aspects of our business infrastructure."

Charlie Kirchner, owner of three New Jersey skating and sports centers, said owners who try to manage multiple rinks and do not hold regular meetings will experience losses. Meetings that involve staff members from each facility are put in place to catch errors, and errors can do serious financial damage, Kirchner said.

"The meetings are reinforcements," he said. "They are also evaluations; they are also question-and-answer sessions. We have an agenda that addresses the things that happened last week. What were the customer evaluations from last week? What did the customers say? Did anyone get hurt? How did they get hurt? Did we follow up?"

These are just a few of the many questions Kirchner and his employees review at their regular meetings, he said, and the issues that arise vary from week to week. The important part is getting everyone together to make sure they are on the same page.

Communication is especially important when multiple-rink owners coordinate promotions and marketing strategies. Kirchner said he keeps his promotional tools consistent at his three rinks because

he wants to use his most successful marketing plan on each facility to increase profits. Part of his marketing strategy is simply handing out free passes to local schools, getting as many kids and their parents through the doors as possible. In the end, maintaining the same marketing strategies throughout all operations is important when considering how it will help overall organization, Kirchner said.

"Organization, mirroring and having trustworthy and dependable general managers make the transition of becoming a multiple-rink operator work in your favor," Couey said. By "mirroring," Couey is referring to maintaining consistency in all operations at the rinks.

Varying the way operations are carried out can become too complicated when managing more than one rink, Bentley said. He said catering to the demographic of people who live near each rink is the only variable that changes in his business plan. He will alter the prices and operation hours depending on the general ages and social statuses of customers who live in proximity to each rink. Promotional tools, however, stay the same.

"We pay close attention to the marketing trends in each area and make use of coupons and other specials in each area to generate more walk-in business and give thanks to our existing regular customers," Couey said.

With time, owners will become more familiar with each rink's needs and should alter marketing strategies accordingly, Couey said. Owners may consider hiring an outside sales representative whose purpose is to organize private events and get the word out about their business.

"Panama City is a smaller town, not as much money, working class people--mostly boat operators," Kirchner said.

"Pensacola is probably my best money-maker. It has working class people but there are so many of them--250,000--that's my largest building too ... so the only thing that really changes are the prices--about 50 cents or a dollar, depending."

There is no doubt that operating multiple rinks is an attainable goal, but challenges will continue to surface even in the most successful businesses.

"Managing people is the most challenging aspect of managing any business," Couey said. "We deal with mainly teenagers at our Hiram rink and mainly college students at our Kennesaw rink. Between scheduling, training and maintaining a clean and properly functioning rink, it can get hectic."

These stresses are handled most effectively by being a presence at each rink, in whatever form that may be, he said. Never neglect a rink, trusting that everything is running smoothly. Rink owners must spend a good amount of time in their rinks to make sure operations are running according to their expectations.

But all of these problems can be solved by hiring trustworthy, up-beat people to manage and supervise each rink's various duties. Also, these employees must be given specific tasks they are expected to accomplish. These tasks with ensure the facility stays clean and customers are happy.

"They need to be in a positive manner with all of the job (duties) they have," Kirchner said. "If you are enjoying what you are doing--which I have always done--and I can find the people who enjoy it the same way, we all win."

Kirchner also believes assigning employees specific tasks is the most effective way to get things done efficiently.

Each manager in Kirchner's facilities does data report sheets, which are scanned and emailed to him. The reports break down information per customer and include how much they spent at the snack bar and on games. Tracking this information lets them compare their success between years and let them know how much they are making off of each customer, Kirchner said. This is one of many duties managers are expected to carry through to establish order.

"I took each of the key managers to the RSA Convention that we just went to in Las Vegas," Kirchner said. "I wanted them to meet and learn from other people, learn from the Association, get excited about our industry. Later, they emailed me the ideas they had to improve the businesses by being there."

Hiring employees with high expectations of themselves will ease concerns that something may go wrong at one of the rinks. This decision is a key player in avoiding what Couey said are the biggest mistakes made when owning multiple rinks.

"The biggest mistake would be ignoring your customers and the maintenance of your building and all of your capital," Couey said. "Take the time to listen to suggestions and use your resources wisely."

Some rink owners and operators agree that their jobs could not be possible without the enthusiasm of staff members. When it comes down to it, successfully managing multiple rinks comes down to having a consistent business plan and enforcing the overall vision through constant communication.

"It's really enjoyable for me," Bentley said. "It's like having a different job every day."

Unique flooring (cont'd from page 1)

the bumps as they take the curve or stay on the other side of the wall.

The bumps are open during every skating session, and skaters like to enter, skate as fast as they can and see how high they can jump. Hardridge compared the experience to skating at a skate park or being on a kiddie roller coaster.

"It's just something different," she said. "They call it jumping in the bumps."

The rink has held contests in the past to see how high skaters can jump. "It's just fun to see if you can do it," she said.

Being one of seven or eight rinks in the Oklahoma City metro area with a population of nearly 1.3 million people, Southwestern Skate Center uses the bumps to stand out among the other rinks. Safety has never been an issue, and the owners have never considered removing them.

"It's very unique, and that's what people remember," Hardridge added.

The concrete bumps have chipped in the past, but the rink owners now

cover them with an epoxy that helps prevent the chipping. The bumps also are coated with the Roll-on skate floor coating like the rest of the rink.



The refurbished hickory floor at Skate Moore Skate Center in Moore, Okla. "glows" thanks to a glow powder added to the coating.

While being able to jump the bumps at Southwestern Skate Center makes the rink memorable, Skate Moore Skate Center in nearby Moore

adds interest to skating sessions with its luminous floor.

Moore is an Oklahoma City suburb of about 55,000 people. After Hardridge



The refurbished hickory floor at Skate Moore Skate Center in Moore, Okla. "glows" thanks to a glow powder added to the coating.

and Crowe acquired the rink, they decided to replace the aging concrete skate floor with a used hickory floor.

When they coated the floor, they

added glow powder to the Roll-On coating, so the floor glows bluish-purple when the black lights are turned on. The rink holds black-out skates at both locations, and lights on the ceiling flash in synch with the music.

At one time both rinks had neon glow paint throughout the building with glowing walls. Southwestern has since changed its décor.

"It gives a nice look to the floor, but it depends on if you start with bare wood," Hardridge said, noting that the glow coating won't show up as well on a floor that has already been coated a lot.

Hardridge estimated it costs about \$150 per application to add the glow powder, and the floor is recoated two to three times per year.

The owners also tried adding the glow to the floor at Southwestern Skate Center, but it didn't show up as well on the darker floor.

So the owners are content with each rink's distinct identity, thanks, in part, to the floor. "We got the bumps, they got the glow," Hardridge said.