

Maryland rink survives several crises, serves the community for 53 years

By Susan Geary

Thirty miles northwest of Baltimore, in Upperco, Md., there's a rink located out in the middle of nowhere. Their huge following of skaters flock to their floor from five neighboring states on Saturday nights.

Opened in 1959, Sportsman's Hall has a storied background. An arsonist leveled the rink in 1992, halting business for five years. In 2005 it sold and closed for another three years. Despite the setbacks of Sportsman's Hall, business is brisk and on the upswing.

Just how does Sportsman's Hall attract such a loyal following and overcome multiple crises? Start with a visit to their Web site to see just how unique Sportsman's Hall is and how it has defied the odds of success.

According to its current operator, Tim Kaylor, Sportsman's Hall is the largest roller rink on the East coast, boasting 30,000 square feet on four acres in the middle of corn fields. It has a 17,000 square foot floating maple floor, and an additional children's/beginner's rink, which also doubles as a dance floor during some late night sessions.

"This place has one hell of a following. I've never seen anything like it," Kaylor remarked on the outpouring of support from his community of skaters. "When it

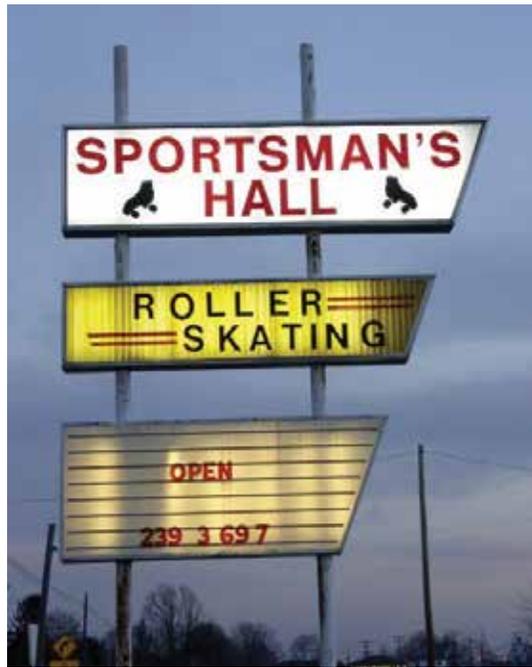
burned down people came from all over to lay wreaths and cry over the ashes." He added, "We are one big family of skaters."

What stands out about Sportsman's Hall is how different it is from most rinks around the country. It's gigantic and closely resembles the original as it stood in 1959. Kaylor strives to keep it running as close to the original facility as possible.

For one thing, he doesn't allow inline skating. He says it impedes the flow of traffic. On Saturday nights, the rink draws about 500 dedicated skaters from five states, attracting jam and shuffle skaters. On Sunday nights, Kaylor puts on organ music, sometimes with a live organist. He claims to have the only live organ music in Maryland, and says skaters from Pennsylvania like organ music.

The snack bar, which is more like a '50s diner, offers up more than 30 items on the menu. Kaylor said, "We purchase high quality, name brand products, and our food is very good." The Roller Rink Luncheonette features milkshakes, sundaes and root beer floats made from nine varieties of hand dipped ice cream. The Luncheonette's floor sports a checker board motif, along with red counter stools. Kaylor

mentioned that he wants to add waitstaff on wheels in the near future and open the Luncheonette to the public even when the



The sign out front of Sportsman's Hall in Upperco, Md. looks much like it did in 1959.

rink is not open.

During the warm weather months, there are outside picnic tables, horseshoe pits, volleyball and badminton. Other spe-

cial events include an annual car show, overnight tent camping and skating for scout badges. Plus, there's the annual corn roast, which doubles as a skaters' reunion, every fall to welcome them to the skating season.

Additionally, the Sportsman's Hall shuts down after every three hour session for a thorough cleaning and reopens for the next session. They don't stay open all day but run several two or three hour sessions in a day. "We are constantly cleaning," said Kaylor.

And Kaylor admitted that while it's a very expensive operation, revenue is up 10 percent this year, as he approaches five years operating the rink.

Last year, Kaylor learned the building's owner was in default and the bank might foreclose. He's trying to get financing together to purchase the property by selling "community shares" with different levels of sponsorship. He needs around \$200,000 for the down payment on a mortgage, which would significantly lower his monthly payments from \$17,000 to \$8,000. A corporation has been formed, and copies of the journals and ledgers are available through Kaylor's accountant.

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