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July-August 2010

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With young employees in your rink, some sage advice from "teen management" professional Ken Whiting will help you guide them on the path to a happy work relationship and higher snack bar profits.

Catch derby fever.....11

Derby isn't just for skaters anymore. Check out how derby teams, and sometimes the venues where they skate, are bringing in new skaters, publicizing the sport of roller skating and increasing profits via team merchandise sales. Even select retailers are cashing in on derby fever.

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Take some summertime money-making tips from successful rink owner Linda Miner. Her summer passes and other out-of-the-box ideas keep a steady influx of skaters coming to her Donora, Pa., rink throughout the "slow" season.

Want to build revenue and skaters? Call in the derby teams

By Jim Morris

Rink owners always on the lookout for something new, something different and, of course, a new source of revenue should begin thinking about two

words: roller derby.

Roller derby is springing up at roller rinks and family entertainment centers all across the country. It is bringing more and more people into the rinks each time two teams get together for a "bout." It is attract-

ing not only skaters – some old and some new – but is also bringing in spectators. One rink, Roller Towne of Visalia, Calif., has attracted more than 1,000 fans for a bout featuring its V Town Derby Dames.

Almost every rink, no matter what kind of floor surface it has, can host roller derby. Most of the teams play in what they call flat track leagues.

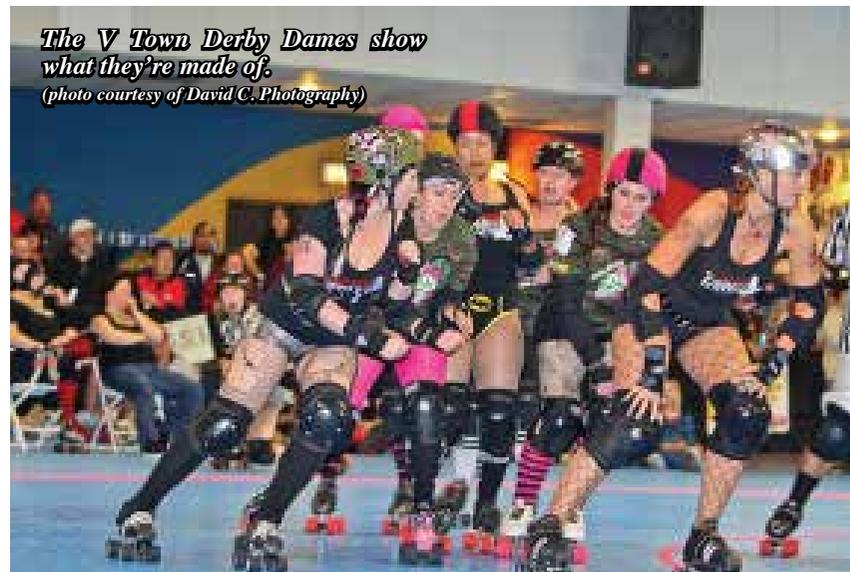
The sport is growing so fast that it is also spreading to younger skaters. Some teams and leagues have started junior roller derby, which, in a few places, is in the process of going from exhibition status to regular competition between cities.

Following is a look at roller derby from the rink owner's point of view and from some skaters, coaches and league organizers.

Derby draws crowds

Joe Latona, owner of Gold Coast Roller Rink in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., said

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The V Town Derby Dames show what they're made of.

(photo courtesy of David C. Photography)

British rink owner bullish on attracting adult market via RollerCAFE

By Connie Evener

Colchester, which is 60 miles northeast of London, was – they say – the site of the legendary Camelot. These days, Art, Gwen and the Knights of the Roundtable would hang out at Rollerworld, "Europe's finest roller skating rink."

Rollerworld's owner, Andy Starr, got his start as a deejay. During a 14-year stint with British Telecom, (still deejaying evenings and weekends) he bought his first rink. "I started originally, 30 years ago, with 30

similarities to running a rink in the U. S. But the few differences really stand out. There are only a handful of roller skating rinks in the U. K., so one of Starr's greatest challenges is to promote skating itself.

"In America, people know what skating is, they know what to expect when they go

to a roller skating rink, but in the U. K., we have to go right back to basics," he said.

Unlike most skating facilities in the U. S., Rollerworld sells alcoholic beverages. Rollerworld's bar is set apart from the rest

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pairs of strap-on rental skates," he told The Rinksider. In 1990, Starr built a brand new roller rink in Colchester, his hometown. Rollerworld has been a U.K. attraction ever since.

Running a rink in the U.K. has many



In the Rollerworld café, servers wear black below the waist, either trousers or skirts, and white shirts with a red bow tie. Cooks wear black and white aprons.

(Photo credit: Dave Byford)

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RollerCAFE (cont'd from page 1)

Independent Voice of the Industry

of the facility in a balcony upstairs that looks down over the skating floor. The RollerBAR isn't a big money maker – it generates only about 5% of the gross income – but Starr thinks it's important to let the adult market know that skating isn't just for kids.

"If you look at the late 1970s, it was THE boom time. Everybody talks about having phenomenal business then. You look at the footage and you talk to the people who were there and it all tells you that adults skated. What I see is that when adults were skating, skating was big. When we lose the adults, we lose the boom times," explained Starr. "The primary purpose of that bar is to have a venue that people grow into and don't grow out of."

Rollerworld's RollerCAFE' generates 18% of the gross income. And pizza, usually the principal item on U. S. roller

rink menus, is nowhere to be seen. It just doesn't sell. "We tried to do pizza many years ago, but for every hundred burgers we sold, we sold one pizza," said Starr, noting that when any menu item drops to less than 5%, it's history. They don't sell candy (known as "sweets" in the U.K.) either.

What does sell? Griddled burgers and veggie burgers; deep fried chicken sandwiches, chicken nuggets, French fries - and the perennial favorite, no matter which side of the Atlantic, potato chips (known as crisps in the U.K.).

Starr's philosophy when it comes to the menu, he said, is based on what he learned from "IN-N-OUT Burger, on the west coast of America, probably the best burger chain I've ever visited." Like IN-N-OUT, Rollerworld's menu is "rationalized." The number of menu items is limited, with only the items in demand

making the final cut. "We're lucky that people eat at the café week after week. We monitor that quite closely," said Starr. "We don't do a vast range. We minimize what we do. But what we do, we try to do well."

Another American staple conspicuously absent in the café is ice in the soft drinks. Europeans in general, and the English in particular, typically prefer drinks without ice. RollerCAFE' sells Coke, Diet Coke, Sprite, Fanta, and a slush – but in smaller portions.

"The U.K. has always been a smaller portion market than the U. S.," said Starr. "We have our machines run in a chilled area, then the machines (themselves) are chilled. Everything is super icy cold." So, without the ice, soft drink portions are probably equivalent. But without the un-melted ice to loiter over, customers finish and move on more quickly, which

means more room for more customers – and more sales.

Because there are so few roller rinks in the U. K. and Europe, said Starr, he counts himself lucky when he gets to talk business with one other person. So he looks forward to RSA conventions. "I first came to America in 1985," said Starr. "I did 11 flights in 14 days and visited with a whole bunch of rink people and learned more in that trip than I'd ever learned."

When The Rinksider caught up with him after this year's RSA convention, Starr was in Nashville, due in Atlanta the next day, Sarasota after that. "I can't tell you what it's like for me to come to a convention and walk into a general assembly where there are 500 people who do what I do," said Starr. "Every time I come to the United States, I learn the whole time."

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Roundup (cont'd from page 1)

there is "no question," roller derby is a good idea to boost revenue.

"We have been very successful with it," said Latona. "But the key is you have to get into it 100 percent. You can't go half way."

For bouts involving the Gold Coast Derby Girls, the rink has had as many as 300 spectators and crowds are growing.

"But you have to be prepared for a lot less, too. Sometimes you might get only 40 or 50 people, so you have to promote it as much as possible," Latona said.

One thing that helps Gold Coast is it has a liquor license, so customers can come in, have a few drinks and watch the bouts just as if they were at a big league baseball game.

Because the sport is just catching on, the nearest team that plays the Gold Coast Derby Girls is in Jacksonville, about a five-hour drive from Ft. Lauderdale. Some of the teams come from other states.

Not only does Gold Coast make money (\$10 per person) from spectators, but also from the team members, from 20 to 30 of them. They buy their skates and other gear from the rink and practice there twice each week. They play four or five home bouts per year.

Latona said setting up the rink for roller derby is not difficult. He has a 63-year-old rink with a wooden floor.

"We put the stripes on the floor and we rent chairs for the bouts. Other than that, we don't do much," he said.

Skaters run the league

At Roller Towne of Visalia, Calif., the most popular bouts are in the winter.

"The smallest crowd we have had was about 300, but that was in the summer time when people were out doing other things," said Alice Mendoza, office administrator at the rink. "Our biggest crowds are always in January and February."

Roller Towne helped get the team, the V Town Derby Dames, going about three years ago. The owners first saw a bout in San Diego and decided it was something to try at their rink. It took about a year of planning, recruiting and practice before the team was ready for competition.

Since then it has become so popular and successful that the rink actually has very little to do with the team operation these days.

"We pretty much turned it all over to them (team members)," Mendoza said. "They use our facility and we help them where we can – such as in promotion and advertising. But they really handle just about everything involving their team."

Mendoza said the rink also profits from equipment sales to team members.

"But from our standpoint the biggest thing is we are bringing people into the rink who have never been here before. They come in to see a bout (\$12

per ticket, \$10 pre-sale) and then they come back to skate," she said.

Last October, the rink secured a license to sell beer during the bouts. Mendoza said she thought that might cause problems in the crowds, but so far all has been peaceful.

"They (spectators) are only in here about three hours for a bout, so nobody is getting drunk. I thought at first we would have some problems, but we haven't," she said.



The Cleveland Firestarters junior league includes girls ranging in age from 8 to 16.

She admitted that having beer helps build the crowd – and the revenue. "I know that some people come because there is beer," she said.

The Derby Dames league consists of two teams – the A team is the Dames and the B team is the Darlins.

"Right after we have a home bout," said skater Angela Gonzales (derby name Doomsday Darling), "there is always plenty of interest and we get some new skaters. We call them 'fresh meat.' So you could really say we have three teams in practice sessions – the A team, the B team and the fresh meat."

Competition, she said, is the key

rink, helped organize the Derby Dames.

"I called around to some of the teams in the bigger cities and asked a lot of questions," she said. "Slowly, we formed our team and it began to take off."

Through the years, one trademark of roller derby has been its aggressiveness.

"We have a good rapport with the teams we play against," Gonzales said. "Sometimes it gets pretty rough, but for

the most part there is good sportsmanship."

She said it can get heated and there is trash talk, elbow throwing and, yes, even some fighting, but for the most part their bouts are good, clean fun.

Starting young

Finding skaters to compete in roller derby bouts at rinks around the country should become easier as time goes by. Not only will more women see the action and want to join in, but several rinks have begun programs for youngsters.



Pictured are the Tampa Bay Junior Derby Chicks and the Tampa Tantrums.

for successful roller derby skaters.

"I love everything about roller derby," said Gonzales, 26, mother of two. "The skating is great and it is very competitive. I was never into other sports, but I really love roller derby. Some people are in love with football or baseball – I have a passion for roller derby."

Although pregnant at the time, Gonzales, then a new employee at the

"By the time these girls are 18, they will already know all about roller derby and will have plenty of experience," said Missy Lingo, a derby skater and coach of the Tampa Bay Junior Derby Chicks.

Lingo has taught figure roller skating for many years, so teaching youngsters to skate for roller derby wasn't a problem.

"We started in November ('09) and many of the kids who signed up for

it had never been on skates or maybe had been skating one or two times," she said.

Recruiting started by circulating flyers and standing at movie theaters passing out passes. By spring, the team had about 20 girls and it seems to grow by one or two each month.

"The biggest thing is getting the word out in the community and changing the perception of what a junior derby girl would look like. Those are the two hurdles we have faced," Lingo said.

Most of the girls have been in the 8-12 age group. The oldest girl is 16. In the beginning, Lingo separated the youngest from the oldest so they wouldn't have to compete against each other.

"Now that we are several months into it, they are getting so good at skating that they aren't afraid of the older girls. So they have no problem going up against an older girl. We have eight-and-10-year-olds who have no problem blocking a 16-year-old."

"Ideally, we would like to have enough girls to have a 10 and under team and an 11-17 team," Lingo said. "That's our goal."

Lingo, 37 (derby name: Miss E Licious for the Tampa Bay Derby Darlins), teaches at Town & Country Skateworld in Tampa, Fla. She also skates for the senior team, which practices and plays bouts at United Skates of America in Tampa.

The approach is similar at Cleveland Ohio's Brunswick Skate Station. That's where the Cleveland Firestarters Junior Roller Derby teams are practicing, hoping to have their first bout late this summer.

"Right now, they will be putting on halftime exhibitions at the senior bouts (Burning River Roller Girls)," said Kellie Weenink one of the organizers of the junior league.

"I had skated with the Roller Girls for about three years and I have three girls of my own, so I thought why not get a program started for them," said Weenink, whose Derby name is "Stealth Bomber." "Roller Derby is so much fun. The skating is great and the competition is outstanding."

She said the league has 25 girls, ages 7-17. All are being taught positional blocking.

"There is no major hitting going on, like in the adult bouts," she said. "Eventually, we probably will have A and B teams. The B teams will stay with positional blocking, but the A team – which will be more of a traveling team – will be pretty much the same as the adults."

Weenink said she hopes more teams in nearby cities will develop junior programs. The Firestarters hope to play bouts against teams from Fort Wayne, Ind., and Indianapolis this year.

"We would like to see Columbus, Cincinnati and Detroit develop junior teams as well," she added.