

Roller derby and roller rinks share common goals, says WFTDA official

By *Connie Evener*

The Texas Rollergirls founded the first roller derby league in 2001. By 2005, there were 50 leagues. By 2011, the league total was at 900 – and counting. Of those, 124 leagues based in the U. S., Canada and the U.K., plus 65 apprentice leagues, had joined the Women’s Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA).

Why roller derby has caught on in such a big way, in such a short time, is “the question of the decade,” said WFTDA executive director Juliana Gonzales (aka “Bloody Mary”). But Gonzales, one of the original Texas Rollergirls, was willing to hazard some educated guesses.

“Roller derby has pretty broad appeal. It’s pretty accessible. It can be played anywhere there’s a flat surface of the appropriate size. I think there’s huge appeal for a women’s contact sport, both for fans and for the athletes,” she said. Roller derby, because it is so new, is one of the few opportunities for women of a diverse age and experience range to play a contact sport.

And while the “lawyer or librarian-by-day, roller girl-by-night” story is now a cliché, it’s based in truth. The diversity of participants runs from stay-at-home moms to factory workers to bartenders to those very lawyers and librarians.

Roller derby’s contagious nature, Gonzales suggested, can also be chalked down to the sense of community that leagues develop. Women skate together several times a week, and they also run

their leagues as businesses, “very grass roots DIY businesses in most cases,” noted Gonzales. “Building a league with a group

adult look and feel” may seem in conflict with the “safety and family fun” environment most rinks strive for, said Gonzales.



Roller derby is an international success with over 900 leagues across the globe and a WFTDA-sanctioned national championship here in the U.S.

(photo courtesy Masonite Burn Photography)

of women, no matter how diverse, is a transformative experience.”

And it’s quickly becoming a transformative experience for women all over the world. “We’ve really noticed the explosive growth in Europe and Australia, starting about five years ago, and now we’re seeing interest from South America and Asia,” said Gonzales, who fully expects to see international WFTDA competitions within the next couple of years. And these days, junior and men’s leagues are popping up all over, too.

On the surface, roller derby, with its emphasis on “physicality, maybe even violence, competitiveness, speed, and its

But when it comes to the love of skating and the desire to keep local rinks thriving, roller derby and roller rinks couldn’t be a better match.

“Roller derby, while it is a contact sport, manages risk better than any other sport I’ve seen,” said Gonzales. “Those who own the leagues are just as concerned as rink owners about preventing liability related to fans, to alcohol, and to injury at an event. I want to assure rink owners that we have a commitment to the safety of both spectators and athletes, just as they do.”

Gonzales hopes rink owners concerned about their floors will talk with leagues and have them demonstrate a prac-

tice or bout. “The speed skaters in the rink where I train can lay down some pretty deep grooves after a couple of months of practice, but derby doesn’t have impact anywhere near that,” she said.

“In many ways, skating is skating. But skating as a contact sport is just so different from other skating disciplines,” said Gonzales, noting that rink owners need to be familiar with the protective gear that’s essential for roller derby. Those who are, and make it a point to stock derby equipment, like mouth guards, will reap the benefits in pro shop sales.

“Our roller derby leagues are really excited to be part of the roller rink community,” said Gonzales. Many rinks provide “homes” for derby practice and embrace roller derby as a skating sport. And the leagues, while promoting themselves, are also promoting skating, and as often as they can, their “home” rinks.

RINKSIDER’s comic artist publishes new graphic novel

Mike Jasorka, professional comic artist and creator of The RINKSIDER’s “As the Wheels Turn,” has created a unique new graphic novel experience.

According to Jasorka, *December 3rd 1967: An Alien Encounter* is an audio adaptation graphic novel (the first of it’s kind) dedicated to the true story of Herbert Schirmer, a Nebraska state patrolman who was taken aboard an alien spacecraft on December 3rd, 1967. The audio CD, which accompanies the graphic novel reading experience, is through Herbert’s own words from a 1970’s U.F.O. conference in Florida. You’ll be able to listen to the compact disc and read the comic simultaneously! Jasorka writes, “Herbert’s heart-felt story speaks of his childhood upbringing, which led him to become a police officer, what happened that very night on duty and why even after countless ridicule, he stuck next to the unbelievable truth.”

The book will soon be available in comic shops and specialty stores nationwide. (You can help by asking your local comic book shop owners to order it from www.bombshell-comics.com).

Jasorka has also created *Roller Dames* (www.rollerdames.com), the first ever roller skating modern pin-up collection and tour, which started in 2008. Affordable limited prints (which are great for any rink) are still available online and are updated weekly.

For more information about Jasorka’s latest endeavor, when it will be available in stores, or to purchase *December 3rd 1967: An Alien Encounter* directly from Jasorka, visit his website at www.bombshell-comics.com.



AS THE WHEELS TURN



By Mike Jasorka (www.rollerdames.com)