

# Texas rink uses creativity, technology to develop unique weekly themes and promotions

By Kathy Bergstrom

From handing out fliers during a skating session to providing secret passwords, Richard Jones has tried it all in efforts to bring skaters to the rinks he's managed.

Jones is the manager of Skate Magic Family Fun Center (owned by Anthony Neel) in Sulphur Springs, Texas, where just about every session has a theme. Success varies, but Jones said it's worth trying anything that has the potential to create a buzz about your business.

"I always say try something. Get the kids to talk about it," said Jones, who has worked in the rink business for 40 years, managing 12 different rinks in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Sulphur Springs is a city of roughly 15,000 people about 80 miles northeast of Dallas.

The most successful theme at Skate Magic is Ladies' Night on the first Saturday of every month, when girls get in free. "I don't even have to advertise it. They just know it after a while," Jones said.

That night brings three or four times more skaters than a typical Saturday night crowd, including the boys, Jones said.

"Overall I make a lot more money by letting them in free than when I charge them," he said. What skaters don't spend on

admission they make up for at the snack bar.

Skate Magic charges \$6.50 admission for Friday and Saturday night sessions, which includes regular skate rental. Inline skates are an extra \$3 to rent.

The rink's second most successful promotion is Password Night, which is held on the remaining Saturday nights each month.

Skaters in attendance Friday night get the password, which when given to staff on Saturday night qualifies them for half-price admission.

It's not a well-guarded secret. Skaters can call and ask for the password. "I don't care if they're out there in the lobby whispering it," Jones said. "As long as they show up for it."

The rink's other themes include \$2 Tuesdays. Admission, skate rental and a slice of pizza and a drink can be had for \$2. But Jones said that theme has not been a success, and he is planning to discontinue it.

Thursdays are Throwback Thursday featuring '70s, '80s and '90s music. Families

can also get in for \$10 and buy a pitcher of a beverage and a pizza for \$10. Fridays are Top 40s Teen Night.

Saturday afternoon sessions are called Fun Day. That's when the rink hosts most of its birthday parties, and sessions feature games and prizes for kids. Sunday is also Family Fun Day.

Jones also tries other promotions to bring skaters in the door.

Each week Skate Magic sends text messages or e-mails to 10 skaters providing them with a perk like free admission, skate rental or a drink.

The rink also will provide discounts to skaters who become friends of the rink on MySpace or Facebook

Jones encourages creativity when developing a theme for a skating session. A theme that works at one rink might fall flat at another, he cautioned, so it's worth trying even off-the-wall ideas. "Some of the craziest things they come up with work the best," he said.

At a former rink, Jones once gave fake fliers to skaters one night and told them to bring them back the next night for free admission. It generated increased admission the next day and interest from other skaters, who called in to find out how they could get their own fliers.

"I ended up going back and getting more fliers," he said.

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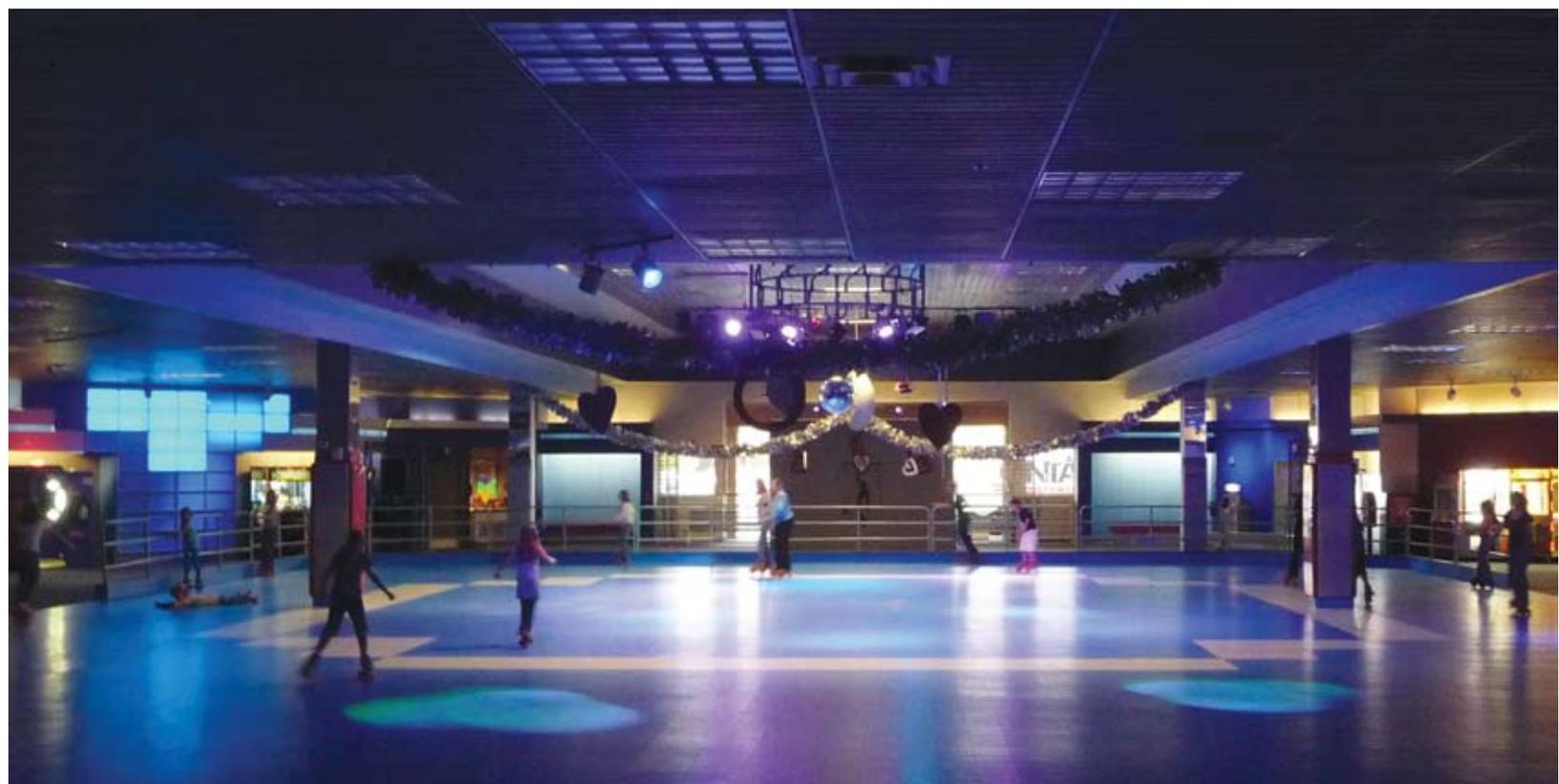
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