

New Illinois family entertainment center holds contest to select name

By Catherine Miedell

Elementary school children from Crest Hill, Ill., brainstormed names for the city's newest family attraction facility created by three partners who will aim their business toward a younger crowd and their parents.

A total of 22 students participated, and four were awarded prizes for their cleverly crafted titles. The name that came out on top was "Family Fun Zone," submitted by students Makayla and Jocelyn who are in separate classes. Both girls won a year of unlimited entry fee and rentals, and an all-inclusive party package for 11 friends complete with food, laser tag and free roller skating. The girls were recognized by the community for winning the contest.

"We wanted to reach out to the community and let them know we are coming," said Michael Chiodo Sr., partner and general manager of the recent Family Fun Zone. "We sat down and brainstormed ways we could do that right from the beginning. It's an idea we've used before, it creates some buzz ... but we weren't sure what to name it either."

Two more prizes for second and third place were given to Vincent and Ethan, respectively. Vincent won a birthday party package while Ethan



Pictured in their new, bright green staff T-shirts are the Family Fun Zone, Crest Hills, Ill., staff and owners Brian Eversman (far left, blue button down shirt), his daughter Michelle (far left), Mike Chiodo (to the right of Brian) and Michael Chiodo (far right, in a staff shirt).

won a laser tag package, each come with food and fun for 11 of their friends.

Prior to the Chiodos father and son duo owning the Family Fun Zone

building, it was Skate West, and while getting approval from the Crest Hill city council to renovate the building its temporary name was Crest Hill Family Fun Center.

The three Family Fun Zone partners are pleased with its current name and have big plans for the facility, said partner Brian Eversman. He would like to see customers walk away from their family outing feeling they did more than roller skate. Eversman and his partners want to create an entire experience for the families who choose Family Fun Zone as their recreation destination, he said.

"We haven't even thought about a lot of upper roller rinks as competition because we are going to be something totally different," Eversman said. "By gearing the attractions more toward kids, the more parents we can get to stick around, and the parents are the ones that have the wallets."

Youth over the age of 14 will be turned away from Family Fun Zone if they come unsupervised, Eversman said. Centering the activities around younger children will hopefully increase their business' revenue, he said, because teens who are unsupervised go on outings with a limited amount of money to spend.

The building's redesign makes kids the priority, but makes sure that parents are comfortable as well.

"The building was designed as a traditional big-skate floor in the '70s," Eversman said. "There weren't too many additional profit centers in the

facility. We are shrinking down the skate floor a little bit, and with that added square footage we are adding a laser tag attraction, and tripling the arcade room."

The arcade room will hold 40 games, Eversman said, and the skating rink's overhaul doesn't stop there. The partners installed a large prize redemption center and expanded the area of the kitchen to max capacity.

So the parents stick around, an eatery with an upscale seating area will serve food items inspired by the area, such as Chicago-style pizza and hotdogs, Chiodo said, and will have the feel of a sports bar. Many parents don't enjoy the blasting music played at many roller skating rinks, so Family Fun Zone will have a seating area that plays music at a low volume.

Another business tactic the partners decided to try is keep operation hours the same every day, said partner Mike Chiodo Jr., son of Michael Chiodo Sr. He said he wants customers to know what they are going to expect and not be limited to the times they can come and skate.

"This is like being dropped right into the heart of the industry," Chiodo Sr. said, "right into the heart throbb of the latest, greatest information. Right in the middle of the fast-moving stream, and I'm really excited about it."

Family Fun Zone held a soft opening on Dec. 16 and will have its grand opening mid-January.

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