

Every town should have a post office, a fire station AND a roller rink

By Connie Evener

When Tiffany Caston fell in love with roller derby, Fayetteville, Ark. was rink-less. So Caston started doing research, making calls and crunching numbers. At the time property values were at a high point and it looked almost hopeless.

But Caston firmly believes that “every town should have a library, a fire station and a rink.” Finally she found a building, run down and fallen on hard times. But it did have potential and a great location. Starlight Skatium was born and it’s pretty much Tiffany’s baby. Her husband and co-owner, Neil, who has an extensive restaurant background, helps out with the concession stand when he can.

Built as a Safeway store in 1950, the building had housed a number of tenants, most recently a non-family friendly video store. “I had to go in and start from scratch, gut it, replace the roof, the air conditioning and all the electrical,” said Caston. “We came in and not only cleaned up the outside and put on a new façade, we put a family-friendly business in as well. People are thrilled.” Fayetteville was cheering them on during the construction phase. Now it’s packing the house every night they’re open.

Over the years, the various owners and occupants had put in false ceilings and covered up the shape of the roof. When the Castons went into the attic for an inspection before buying the building, they discovered “this beautiful wooden domed ceiling,” said Caston. “It was very unique architecturally,” and perfectly suited for “that retro look from the 1950s.”

Finding someone to fix the roof, with its unique shape, proved difficult, but Caston persevered and ended up putting insulation on the outside over the domed roof, and covering it with reflective membrane roofing, which will hold the heat in the winter and the cool in the summer – without putting insulation in the attic where it would hide the ceiling.

The floor is maple – and it floats, which means it has been built to expand and contract and won’t warp or buckle. Audio Lite provided the sound and light system. “We have a huge light show and the sound is amazing. The building shape – with the dome – helps with the sound and it’s actually quite cool,” said Caston. And the skates, light and dark blue suede, with the Starlight Skatium logo on the ankle, are Custom Pacer Platinum Rentals from R.C. Sports. “They are very cool skates,” said Caston.

When Caston made those calls to

other rink owners, they told her horror stories of utility bills gone astronomical. “It was pretty scary,” said Caston, so she clicked her way through HVAC information on the Internet and found a local firm, COENCO, which specializes in energy efficiency. “They do giant air movers for big warehouses where the contents

have to stay at a certain temperature constantly. They’d done a local gym and I saw the testimonial. I thought that was similar to my needs, having such a high roof and people in there working out and exercising and sweating.”

The new energy saving technology also offered some attractive

tax rebates. When Rinksider talked with Caston after she’d been up and running for two months, she was pleased. Those two months were “super, super cold,” she said. “But our last bill was just maybe double what our home bill was. The rink is 17,000 square feet and our house is nowhere near that, so I already see the advantages of using this system.”

When it came to naming her new baby, Caston liked the idea of “Skatium,” which gives a sense of stadium, which fits with the shape and size of the building. And since she wanted to create a venue for activities other than skating, she liked “Starlight,” which will look classy embossed on wedding invitations: “Reception to follow at Starlight Skatium.”

As for birthday parties and family outings, Fayetteville was starving for a choice other than Chuck E. Cheese. “There are so many young families here and absolutely nothing to do with the kids. I know. I have three kids myself,” said Caston.

Starlight Skatium has a web site (www.starlightskatium.com), but Caston started out with a Facebook page, and it’s still going strong. One of the advantages, she noted, is that whereas she has a web designer who manages the web page for her, she can manage the Facebook page on her own. “I can get on Facebook myself and run a special for that night and immediately it reaches all my fans.” And the number of fans, she said, grows daily. “It’s the easiest advertisement I could get. And it’s free.”

As a matter of fact, back before she opened in late December 2009, Caston used Facebook to let people know she was looking for employees. She decided not to hire people she knew. “I thought it would be best as a business owner not to go with my friends just because they’re my friends.” So Facebook brought in the job applicants. “That’s how I hired my first batch of employees,” she said. “So far, so

good, because they’re all still around and I really like them all.”

As a child, Caston skated on ice, not hardwood, and traveled all over Texas as a competitive figure skater. Years later, she and Neil began roller skating at adult nights in Austin. “I guess the kids might have slowed us down on our roller skating date night,” she said. They moved to Arkansas eight years ago, and Caston discovered roller derby.

“It was just an immediate attraction. I’ve been fairly athletic all my life, and competitive, and I also really like contact sports – I have two brothers. So it was right up my alley,” said Caston.

Since she became a founding member of the Arkansas Killbillies (<http://nwarollerderby.com/arkansas-killbillies>)

four years ago, roller derby has pretty much taken over her life, said Caston, aka Apache Rose #8, “It’s turned into more than a hobby now. That love of skating has turned into my livelihood. And this is the coolest job ever.”



Tiffany Caston, derby girl and rink owner.



Tiffany Caston, a.k.a. Apache Rose, and family

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