

Ohio rink's decisions please parents, boost pro shop, attract corporates

By Jan Mowle

Over the last several years, the general Top 100 music became so broad that many parents became concerned about their children listening to inappropriate lyrics. Leaders at Skate Zone 71 in Columbus, Ohio, decided that utilizing Radio Disney would put parents' fears to rest.

Starting at the beginning of the 2008 school year, the skating center began using Radio Disney at public skating sessions as well as at private parties. Parent response was overwhelming approval.

"We believed Radio Disney was more appropriate, and the parents were so much more comfortable with it," said Bobbi Burke, general manager of Skate Zone 71, a United Skates of America skating center.

Burke added that the rink has seen an increase in public sessions and said that they have booked more school parties because of the music.

"It's a very defined type of music," she said. "The children relate to it, and our parent/teacher organization contacts appreciate that we offer it."

Skate Zone 71 has also seen an increase in pro-shop sales, due to the fact that the Ohio RollerGirls league practices

at the rink. In 2007, the team approached the skating facility when they were starting their league and wanted to conduct practices there.

"They started with one practice a week and quickly grew to four practices a week," Burke said. The league is now down to two practices a week at the facility as its focus has shifted from playing all home games to becoming more of a travel league.

The rink has a beginning practice area as well as the main skate floor. The girls in the roller derby league practice for skating skills and endurance. This includes balance and technique. Burke said the girls practice at the United Skates of America on the east side of Columbus for derby techniques and for bouts.

Many of these ladies were not frequent skaters prior to joining the league.

"They were tough and very athletic," Burke added, "but they were really starting from scratch with equipment."

This benefited the rink in sales of skates, helmets, pads and more. Pro-shop sales increased dramatically, Burke said. In addition, these roller derby ladies wanted to upgrade to a higher price package as their skills improved.

The actual derby bouts are held at an old Columbus indoor hockey arena.

The group soon learned that it was difficult to draw other teams to travel to Columbus all the time, so they now have three or four bouts a year in Columbus, while the remaining bouts are ones to which the ladies travel.

Burke said that now the league accepts fewer new girls, so the current pro-shop sales from this source are mainly wheels and accessories.

Skate Zone 71, which opened in 1972, also has a booming birthday party business despite the current economy. The skating center also offers laser tag and a climbing wall as well as a large game room and redemption center. Burke said the center also boasts a more upscale pizza restaurant that emphasizes volume and quality.

"We appeal to a wide variety of ages with what we have to offer," Burke added. "We draw everything from preschool age groups to corporate outings. Many corporations reserve our center for the laser tag and climbing wall and are always surprised to see how many employees want to skate.

"It's a nostalgia thing for these customers who haven't skated since they were kids," she added. "They get out with their peers and really have fun. It allows adults to be kids again. They even play all of the redemption games and win

prizes for their kids or for friends' kids.

"It's fun and it's not something they get to do every day," Burke concluded.

Fun with novelties:



Two young skaters at Skate Station in Calif., show off their BIG sunglasses and glow-in-the-dark teeth. Owner Linda Simler said, "My husband Duane didn't think the big sunglasses were a good idea at first. We sold six of the 12 pairs the first weekend."

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916 Hornbeak Court, Las Vegas, NV 89123
714.504.7742 | bill@bill-carlson.net

