

Roller skating can create a lifetime of social and physical benefits

By Jan Mowle

Roller skating operators all do a great job of promoting roller skating as a fun activity. After all, gathering with friends for roller skating, playing games, enjoying birthday parties and offering fun redemption prizes is all part of the repertoire in the hand of cards you have to offer patrons.

However, there is an untapped marketing angle that owners can push successfully and see the fruits of their labors. Physical fitness as a part of roller skating can easily fit into the current fitness craze.

Bill Carlson, owner of Profit Mentors, said operators haven't really imaged roller skating for what it really is.

"We've lost the health of it," he said. "It's a lifetime activity -- a lifetime of fun and enjoyment that also involves social and physical interaction."

"We haven't sold the idea to people that they can make roller skating a part of their healthy lifestyle," Carlson continued. "We tend to focus on indoor skating as fun."

Carlson wanted to remind rink

owners that there are people in warmer climates who roller skate to their workplaces or skate on the beach. "We've missed this critical market," he said, "because we can get these people indoors to skate as well."

According to Liz Miller, author of *Advanced In-Line Skating*, skating contributes directly to improving many sought-after exercise goals, including strength, endurance, aerobic fitness and body fat reduction.

Miller said fast-paced roller skating has been proven to be just as aerobically beneficial as running. "Compared to cycling," she noted, "an equal skating effort results in a better muscular workout for hips, thighs and shins."

Roller skating doesn't involve the jarring footfall that is involved in overused or aging lower body joints, she said. Also, because skating is a weight-bearing activity, a skating workout contributes to bone density.

Consistent skate training has



ing this targeted message for six or seven years successfully."

Basically, Palermo said the idea behind the targeted message is to tell your audience they can get fit while having fun.

"We also promote that roller skaters burn 875-1,500 calories in an average two-hour session," she added. "We have a banner posted that talks about the number of calories burned and explains to our customers that skating strengthens the cardiovascular system and builds muscle strength."

Palermo said there is a concern among educators that kids aren't getting enough physical fitness these days. Teachers, principals and parents are concerned, she said, that kids are sitting

in front of the television too much watching television or playing games on the television or computer.

"It's definitely an added bonus to the educators that these kids are having fun and getting in shape," Palermo added. She said this type of tagline would be great to target physical education teachers in any market.

Carlson said some rinks still do slimnastics, slim and fit, and skater-cise programs. He pointed out as well that many rinks have mostly healthy foods to offer and that skating center operators should call attention to that for their customers.

"Many rinks do very little fried foods and our menus are good for optimal nutrition," he said.

Carlson added that the new generation skating facility should be more accommodating to the physical aspects of skating. "We could have shower facilities where people could come and skate at lunch and shower afterwards," he said.

In addition, he said, there really isn't a need to market fitness as part of roller skating to kids because they don't automatically associate the fun of skating with their friends with keeping physically fit.

As Carlson said, "Skating transcends all generations. We have to market it as a great activity and image the sport as part of overall health and physical fitness. People make the business what it is and what it can be."

been found to tone and build stronger, more stable leg, pelvis and hip muscles, Miller added. The quadriceps are strengthened while gliding in a tuck position and from the repeated contractions and extensions. Miller said each stroke puts hamstrings, buttocks and hip flexors into play for balance and propulsion while the abdominals and lower back remain contracted to stabilize the upper body. This also works the adductors (inner thigh pulling muscle) and the abductors (outer thigh pushing muscle).

Miller also noted that as long as skaters apply themselves to purposeful skating workouts with specific goals, skaters can enjoy the maximum possible benefits from fitness skating.

Rink operators can in turn benefit from beginning or maintaining fitness programs in their centers. Carlson said some owners and operators have fitness programs in their rinks and market them quite well to both school-aged children as well as to adults.

Karen Palermo, sales manager of United Skates of America in Seaford, N.Y., said they apply the "fun and fitness" concept to any school parties, daycare trips and group parties.

"We use the tagline of fun and fitness to encourage the decision makers (teachers, principals and daycare center directors) to come and use our facility for both fun and fitness," Palermo said. "We've really been push-

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