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Gym will replace closed roller rink

JONATHAN BARNES /

JUL 28, 2005 | 12:00 AM

While some Forest Hills residents feared that a local roller rink would go out with a murderous bang, the generations-old facility quietly faded away recently before many knew what happened.

Even Forest Hills Mayor Ray Heller Jr. said he was surprised to hear that Ardmore Roller Skating Palace had closed.

The borough and the rink owner, New Jersey businessman Joel Aranson, had recently agreed to a consent decree Forest Hills officials had sought to stop disturbances there. The agreement placed limits on the rink's hours of operation and required borough officials and police to be notified when special events occurred.

"I think we both spent a lot of time and money on lawyers' fees," Heller said. "We were fully expecting them to stay open."

Aranson could not be reached for comment about the rink's closing.

Over the past several years, Ardmore Roller Skating Palace had developed a reputation as the scene of unruly mobs of teens. It was in the basement of a building at the corner of Ardmore and Yost boulevards in Forest Hills for 30 years and was nearby prior to that time. Cost Corp., a construction company, owns the building and has its offices in it.

A new fitness center is replacing the rink. Michael Klein, a Pittsburgher who owns the 10-year-old Fitness Factory in Shadyside, is renovating the subterranean roller rink into a gym, Fitness Factory 2. Klein's business will occupy all of the 20,000 square feet of the former roller rink.

Similar to the Fitness Factory in Shadyside, the new gym will offer free weights, Nautilus-style equipment, plate-loaded machines, and a full line of cardiovascular equipment, with 60 machines, including 22 treadmills, Klein said. The gym will not offer aerobics or other classes.

Klein said he has been looking for the past three years to open a second facility. He had almost signed leases in Oakmont and Verona, but the deals fell through. When he heard that the roller rink space was opening up, he was immediately interested. He signed a lease for the space in June.

"I think Forest Hills is a good area because there's [no gym] there. And Forest Hills was an area that really needed a gym," Klein said. "I think Route 30 has a great traffic flow."

Contractors working for Klein have been renovating the roller rink for a few weeks. The weights and machines for the gym will be located in the space where the rink itself was, Klein said. The facility's restrooms are being rebuilt entirely to create new locker rooms.

Klein said he expects to open the new gym on Sept. 15. "I'm really hoping the Forest Hills [location] allows me to interact more with my clientele," Klein said.

The addition of the new fitness center to the borough's business district is great news for the community, Heller said. "I think we can definitely use something like that," he said. "I think it's great. I'm glad they were able to fill that space so quickly."

First Published July 28, 2005, 12:00am

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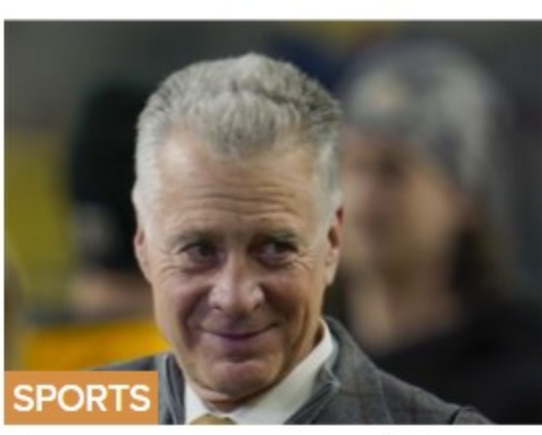
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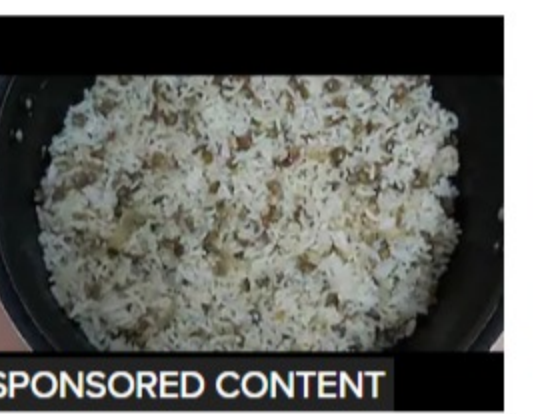
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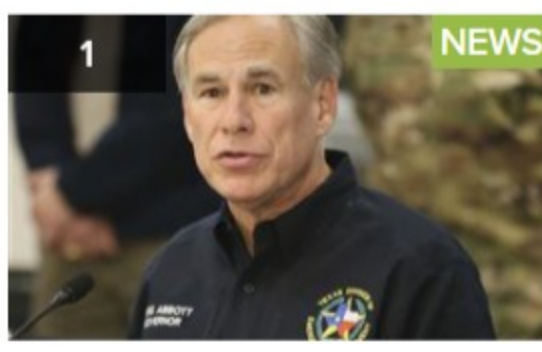


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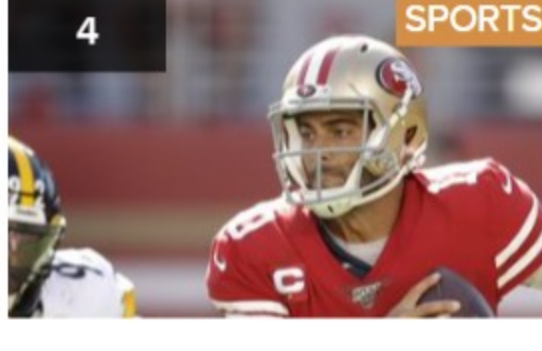
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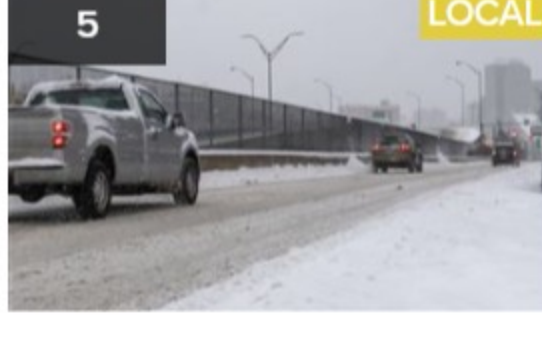
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