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# Memories skate away with rink's closing

Staff Writer The News Herald  
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The county's last skating rink is now closed. *The News Herald*

If you are under the age of 40 or spent your childhood in Bay County, odds are good that at one time or another your feet graced the entrance, but never the wooden floor, at 333 W. 14th St.

Untold thousands of kids accompanied by parents, and teens joyously with no parents in tow, walked in the entrance of The Skate Factory, pausing only long enough to either rent a pair of roller skates or lace up their own before hitting the waxed and shiny hard wooden surface.

It was a different time, and it is a time that has come to an end here for now with the closing of the iconic spot for young romance and birthday parties that didn't break the budget.

"It was one of the local icons," Skate Factory owner Bob Sterrett told The News Herald. "It was a wonderful thing we did for the community. We had the best employees."

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Sterrett is 77 now and the economy doesn't soar on the same things it used to. He sold the building in October to DMG Commercial Holdings because of a downturn in business; real estate broker Don Nations, agent for DMG, said his client owns the next three properties to the west and wants to upgrade the building to tie in to those properties.

"My mission is to find a quality tenant for that space," Nations said. "We've had prospects."

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We hope Nations is successful in his mission because that would be good news for Panama City, which has found itself struggling to attract new businesses.

Still, knowing the skating rink is gone is just another reminder to many that times are changing as we age. A generation without video games saw an outing to the skating rink as almost a rite of passage, a place without parents where a boy and girl could hold hands during the "couples skate." For parents it was a safe place to leave their young teens, an affordable place for a birthday party, a place they likely had been to as youngsters themselves.

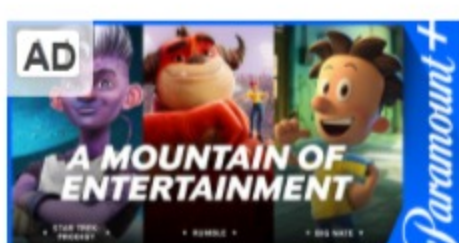
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There's nothing wrong with today's outdoor amusements for kids, it just doesn't seem the same.

Or maybe we're just getting old, too.

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