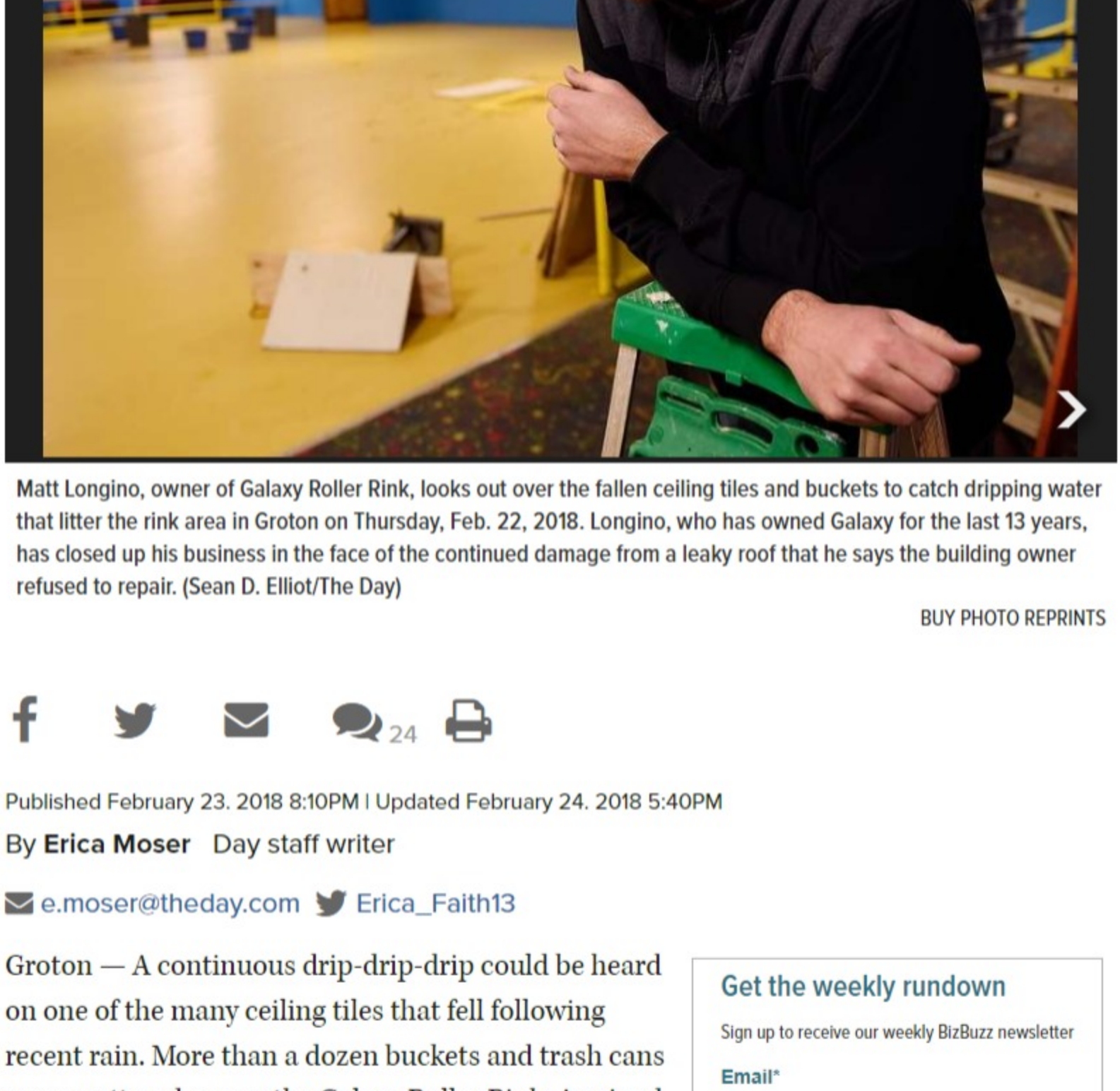


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Galaxy Roller Rink closes



Matt Longino, owner of Galaxy Roller Rink, looks over the fallen ceiling tiles and buckets to catch dripping water that litter the rink area in Groton on Thursday, Feb. 22, 2018. Longino, who has owned Galaxy for the last 13 years, has closed up his business in the face of the continued damage from a leaky roof that he says the building owner refused to repair. (Sean D. Elliot/The Day)

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Published February 23, 2018 8:10PM | Updated February 24, 2018 5:40PM
By Erica Moser Day staff writer

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Groton — A continuous drip-drip-drip could be heard on one of the many ceiling tiles that fell following recent rain. More than a dozen buckets and trash cans were scattered across the Galaxy Roller Rink. A ruined projector lay on the floor.

Rink owner Matt Longino had taken down the TVs and sold items from the skate shop on eBay. He intermittently fielded phone calls from upset parents looking for a refund on their scheduled birthday parties. His next step would be selling the larger items: the roller-skating pinball machine, the air hockey table, the Hoop Fever game.

Longino closed Galaxy Roller Rink at 210 Bridge St. for good on Wednesday, as worsening leaks from the roof posed a safety hazard to skaters.

But building owner Lou Trefes said there's a "good chance it will be reopened again," albeit under new management.

"I'll get somebody else in there to run the skating rink," Trefes said on Thursday. "In fact, I've had some inquiries already."

Longino has owned the business for 13 years, and he said he spent 12.5 of them "begging" Trefes to replace the roof. He also tried unsuccessfully to buy the building.

Trefes said every time Longino called him about leaking, he sent roofers over; Longino said Trefes stopped sending people years ago.

Trefes said on Thursday, "We can put a roof on; it's no biggie."

He declined to comment further, referring questions to his attorney, Yona Gregory. She did not respond to calls on Thursday or Friday.

Attorneys came into play when Trefes sued Longino late last year, in an eviction action. The complaint stated that Longino "failed to pay the rent due under the lease" for each month from Dec. 1, 2016, to Oct. 1, 2017.

Longino disputes the complaint's assertion that the lease expired on Nov. 4, 2017, saying it ended in 2015. He said he wasn't paying rent because Trefes "wouldn't repair anything," and so Longino was using the money to do things like patch the roof and buy ceiling tiles.

A spot for competition and childhood fun

Lou Trefes built the rink in 1955, and it was named Melody Skating Rink at the time. His wife was a competitive skater and a coach.

It has held several names since, such as Roll On America and Skatetown USA. Longino said it has been Galaxy Roller Rink for the past 23 years.

Ken Perkins ran the rink from about 1978 to 1988, and now he and some family members are skating instructors. He said a lot of parents and grandparents thanked him, saying a doctor told them to have their child take up roller skating for motor skills.

The advanced skaters at Galaxy Skating Club have moved to the Skate-Inn in Plainfield to practice, but Perkins doesn't know what the future holds.

"Nationals is in July," he noted. "The year has to continue, so we have club members, who no matter what, have to move to other rinks to continue this year, and we'll see what happens next year."

Shoreline Roller Derby, meanwhile, is "desperately" looking for practice space and locations to hold three home games this year, according to a news release from board Vice President Shannon Lewis (known in the derby world as Dirty Olive).

The derby players also have been going to Skate-Inn, she said, but it's not big enough for a track.

"We're not going to let this hold us back," Lewis said. "We're certainly going to find something, whether or not we start shelling out more of our own personal money."

While Lewis has only been playing roller derby for four years, she grew up down the street from the rink and would skate most weekends as a kid. Certain songs from the '80s still bring back memories of skating.

Over the years, the team has partnered with United Way and Shoreline Soup Kitchens for fundraising. It had a scrimmage benefiting the Sandy Hook School Support Fund. It entered people donating blood into a drawing for two tickets to a doubleheader.

Dozens have taken to Facebook to express sadness at the closure of the rink, share memories and praise Longino's management.

Problems escalate

In November, Trefes & Trefes General Partnership sued Longino for possession of the premises, setting in motion an eviction action.

Judge Francis Foley III in December approved a stipulated agreement that was signed by Trefes & Trefes attorney Gregory and Peter Hoops, attorney for Longino. Neither attorney responded to requests for comment on Thursday or Friday.

The agreement stipulated that for each month from December 2017 through May 2018, Longino would make a use and occupancy payment of \$6,000, according to court records. The complaint had stated that the rent was \$7,000.

The judgment in favor of Trefes & Trefes gave a final stay of execution through May 31.

The agreement stated, "Upon vacating, defendant(s) shall remove all possessions, leave the premises broom clean and return all keys to the Plaintiff."

Longino said he and Trefes haven't spoken about extending the agreement but claims it was already his intention not to operate beyond May.

"I had already started to wind the business down and not book anything behind that anyway," he said, "because without a roof, you can't operate."

On Feb. 12, the City of Groton Building and Zoning Department "received a telephone complaint with regard to water and a ceiling tile on the skating floor," building official Carlton Smith wrote in a Feb. 12 letter to Trefes & Trefes General Partnership.

Upon his inspection, Smith found that water has continuously leaked through the roof exterior, and he noticed at least 12 penetrations through the drop ceiling.

"Be advised any accumulation of water on the floor will be cause for the temporary removal of the public for safety reasons," Smith wrote. He stated the office was expecting a report from a professional roofing contractor by Feb. 28.

On Feb. 12, but prior to Smith's writing of the letter, Longino applied for a building permit for "roof patching & evaluation of roof replacement," at an estimated cost of \$1,000.

Longino told The Day estimates for roof replacement are \$250,000 to \$500,000.

Longino sought professional opinions from roofing contractors Advanced Group and Silkton Roofing; both gave their assessments to Longino in writing this week.

"In all honesty, it is incredibly surprising that the roof has lasted as long as it has after enduring all of the wear and tear brought forth by mother nature," wrote David Preka, president of Advanced Group, after noting that the roof in its current condition is beyond repair.

Jim Barba of Silkton Roofing said recommended repairs cannot be warranted due to the condition of the roof.

On Thursday, Longino wrote to Smith informing him he would like to rescind his building permit application because he is unable to make repairs.

"We have had to close or close early the majority of our normally scheduled business operations during this month and many previous," he wrote. "In the interests of safety, Galaxy Roller Rink is closing effective immediately."

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Commenting is closed. Comment threads are monitored for 48 hours after publication and then closed.

READER COMMENTS

ax iban 4 years ago **Report**

Very clear by the interior pictures that water has been causing damage for many years and allowed to continue. The Bottom line here is the roof would have to be fully replaced and the truss system would require an engineering safety inspection. That building really needs to be razed and either rebuilt from the ground up or the property repurposed for some other purpose. I soundly stand behind what Mr Longino did and whole heartedly believe that Mr Trefes is an unscrupulous SOB. He is the poster child for Stupidity and Reckless disregard by allowing the building to fall into such a pathetic state of disrepair and still allowing the public to enter into such a safety hazard. The City Inspectors report on the roof integrity should be the ultimate icing on the cake for the Landlord. This would be the ideal situation to utilize the City of Groton report plus all documented repairs and costs to drag the Landlord into court and sue him for everything he owns and then some. That would be redemption!! I believe that the attorneys know that Trefes' claims are full of holes and no substance. Otherwise eviction proceedings would have been already completed by now.

JRSR 4 years ago **Report**

Gas

Sharleez 4 years ago **Report**

Good luck to Matt, it's a shame what this horrible landlord put him and his business through. It was the EB Purchasing Dept. that was in the building and back then a typing pool typed all the paperwork up for the purchasing staff.

karenskate99 4 years ago **Report**

This makes me wonder if L. Trefes owns the building down the street, the old Norm's Bar??? That's been vacant and deteriorating for years now too?!

karenskate99 4 years ago **Report**

So sorry the Longino's went through all of this and best of luck to you both in your future endeavors thank you for keeping this rink open as long as you did! I skated there as a child/teen and this place will always hold special fond memories for me. It's sad and frustrating at the same time to see this building and rink close due to the slumlord that cared more about making money than upkeep and proper maintenance in a once thriving business.

karenskate99 4 years ago **Report**

Not sure if many of you know this but this building was once used as a typing pool building for EB. I know this because my mom worked there back in the late 60's. And now there's a rumor this building will be used for EB again in the form of a parking lot??? Hmmm wonder how true this rumor is???

My thoughts 4 years ago **Report**

Trefes states "he can put a roof on, it's no biggie." Sorry, but it IS a biggie and when you don't, you lose everything, next to mention you are a slumlord. It'll be interesting to see how this plays out in the next year or two...

Barbara Jones 4 years ago **Report**

We had a wonderful birthday celebration for my 5 year old granddaughter recently. The staff was delightful and everyone had a great time. The building, however, was a disaster. Toilets not working, bathroom sinks clogged, ripped carpets, and ceiling tiles discolored and falling, etc.

We actually laughed over the fact that it seemed the same tile had been falling for years! Not funny for the rink owner Matt Longino.

I hope the Longino's can reopen the Galaxy in the Groton area and continue their successful business. The landlord is a slumlord and should be run out of town!

Chris Jawaka 4 years ago **Report**

Continued.

Carpets, bathrooms, the ENTIRE ROOF and the list goes on. He wanted nothing more than to update the entire building for years, but was unable to risk investing millions of dollars into something that didn't belong to him or without a lease agreement. As a wife, I would have to see him crushed when people complained about the repairs that needed to be done. People spoke with such harsh, cruel words without knowing the truth. Many thought he was neglecting his business when really he was helplessly watching his efforts go to waste. Many of you know my husband and are aware of his work ethic and relentless drive for success. This was my husband's first business and it has been a huge part of our family over the years. He wanted so much more for that place and feels a huge sense of guilt because of the joy that business has brought this community for many years. I can't begin to express through words how proud I am of Matthew Longino for keeping Galaxy going for as long as he did. Providing families with such wonderful memories to cherish forever. I hope you Matt for all the joy that you did, for our family and our community. I'm excited for the next part of our journey.

Chris Jawaka 4 years ago **Report**

Erin Longino

February 21 at 8:05pm ·

Well this is not going to be easy to write without shedding some tears but I need to speak up on behalf of my husband. As some of you may have heard or will hear soon, Galaxy Roller Rink has shut its doors for good. I don't quite know where to begin but I want to confirm some things that may be unknown. First, my husband does not own the building. For years he had tried to purchase the building from the owner without success. Three years ago, my husband's lease agreement was up and he diligently tried to form a new agreement but his efforts were ignored. Instead, he was left in limbo, always worried about the future. Since 2014, he has had to pay for all building repairs out of pocket (many roof related) just to keep the business functioning. Regardless of these setbacks, he continued to run his business to the best of his ability all while watching the building deteriorate because of all the major repairs that needed to be done.

Chris Jawaka 4 years ago **Report**

There was a post from the owner's wife shared on my Facebook yesterday announcing this with the reasons that offered a little more details into the problems they were having with the landlord. I'll post it if I can find it.

WTFD Resident 4 years ago **Report**

Lots of great memories there as a kid! The owner sounds like a tool!

SummerGirl 4 years ago **Report**

I feel for this business owner. Longino did well with what he had to work with. The landlord sounds like a deadbeat, he should have stepped up to do the right thing but never had any intention of doing so. I'm sad to see the rink close.

Apollo 4 years ago **Report**

Looks like with all the requests made from rink owner M Longino to building owner L Trefes he was just "skating in circles", building owner's nickname around the region is "Louie the LOSER", unfortunately sounds like it fits.

Fred in NJ 4 years ago **Report**

Never own a building with a flat roof.

just the facts 4 years ago **Report**

Another looming hulk of a rotting, vacant building joins the Groton landscape. This landlord is a bum and a crook.

dc.gths 4 years ago **Report**

I heard a rumor that he plans to sell this to EB for parking. I think he knew this all along.

Patricia Nugent 4 years ago **Report**

So sad to see another Groton landmark bite the dust. This was a great place to take your kids on a rainy Sunday afternoon. Meeting up with friends, celebrating birthdays, and just hanging out and having good, wholesome fun.

Best of luck to you - and thank you for many fond memories.

Igor 4 years ago **Report**

Id say the owner of the building is being slightly less than truthful. All you need to do is look at the pictures and the fact the city shut it down for safety concerns. Longino shouldn't be held responsible to pay rent on a facility that was allowed to deteriorate into it's present condition. Sad to see it go, held one and been to many kids birthday parties there...my wife skated there as a kid too.

Native Oracle 4 years ago **Report**

The good part about this landlord who didn't provide a dry skating rink is that he will now pay taxes to Groton out of his own pocket instead of ripping off Longino and using Longino money. You can see from the pictures, the roof leaks, so the landlord is definitely a scammer.

InformedComment 4 years ago **Report**

I've heard nothing but good things about Longino, who was a key sponsor of Groton kids soccer. Doing the right things, but continuously stifled by a greedy, complacent and ignorant landlord. Best of luck to you I'm sure what goes around will come around.

Intentsone 4 years ago **Report**

So no theater, no roller rink, no Benny's, no radio shack, many empty storefronts, we are turning into new London.

gram 4 years ago **Report**

Does anyone really believe the comments from the landlord? Really...quotes from local businesses to replace roof that are astronomical - not to mention any other repairs or work that the building needs in its old age....and this joker claims to have sent out roofers every time called? And I'm willing to bet this business will remain closed...highly unlikely anyone has inquired....and really...they can't get a permit until this is fixed. Good luck on that.

Matt - nothing but the best to you and your family going forward. You did good by the City of Groton by giving us all a place our families could go and spend an afternoon laughing and having a good time. You kept this alive so we could share it with our kids. The passion that you put into this was noticed by all.

Timbo 4 years ago **Report**

Looks like obesity wins again.

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3:12 pm

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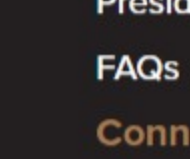
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2:12 pm

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