

NEWS

Closing of area's last roller rink sends skaters into spins

by Chelsea Grinstead August 24, 2022



Music in Motion Family Fun Center closed Aug. 21 | photo by Chelsea Grinstead

It's the end of an era for roller skaters. Music in Motion Family Fun Center roller rink in Summerville shut its doors for good Sunday night. A rink employee confirmed Monday that the skating facility has permanently closed.

Last Thursday, at the rink's final adult night, skaters zipped along, displaying skills that spanned from spinning and dancing on wheels backwards to apprehensive first-timers feeling it out. A disco ball spun along with the tunes that weren't necessarily child-appropriate.

As word spread the rink would close permanently, skaters unabashedly filmed one another to document their joy and camaraderie as they zoomed around in circles grooving to the beat.

The closing of Music in Motion is a major cultural loss for the area, many say, especially since the only other rinks in the area, Hot Wheels Skate Center and Stardust Skate Center, closed in 2014.

Roller skating as one man's therapy

Summerville native Demont Teneil said he has skated at Music in Motion for 14 years. For him, roller skating is therapy to help navigate career and relationships changes.

"I needed something that no one could take from me — and it was skating," Teneil said. "It's been my outlet. I just kept going and just kept trying new tricks and it rolled me out of depression."

Teneil said he heard from his fellow skaters that Music in Motion, which opened in 2001, would not be a roller rink much longer.

"I'm sad that it's been sold but it will definitely still always be a part of me, because I've learned so many of my tricks at the skating rink," Teneil said. He plans to start traveling to Savannah, Ga., and Columbia to rink skate, and will hit the outdoor skate areas, such The Bridge Spot off of Poinsett Street in downtown Charleston.

The legacy of Music in Motion

The dynamic of teaching and learning is a big part of the roller skating experience at Music in Motion, others said.

"Everybody's really nice and supportive," said Nick Velez, who's been skating regularly at Music in Motion since February. He has roller skated for about 16 years and used to be an instructor in Southern California before he moved to Goose Creek.

"Everybody's really cool and down to help out," he said. "If you're struggling, don't fear. They'll help you up. If you have any questions, if you want to learn something, they're more than happy to show you how to do it. If you're trying to pop off and be yourself, they're all about it."

Shmeika Hall from Goose Creek said she worked at Music in Motion for almost a year before she left her position as a rink floor guard last June.

"Working here was important to me because I was able to teach people how to skate," she said. "I was able to interact and make skating friends. When I first started skating here, maybe five years ago, it was a very small crowd of adults, but over time it has grown. [The rink] was like a safe place for adults to come and have fun, and I don't know how we're going to do that now."

A few months ago, Auburn Fiore, who lives in Knightsville, visited Music in Motion for the first time in 10 years. As a child, she said she visited frequently.

"When I came here for adult skate night, I realized how joyous and amazing the community is here," Fiore said. "While we're here, we're all one big community that loves to come together, dance and have a great time. I'm definitely scared of losing a place for us all to gather and bond over roller skating."

Roller skating is just as much about congregating as a group as it is the privilege to have a space to skate, she said. Outdoor roller skating isn't an ideal option for beginner skaters, she added, because of uneven concrete, blistering heat and rules that prohibit skating at sports courts around the area.

"It's definitely devastating," Fiore said. "Now all the people that have bonded over this super-interesting talent and hobby, there's nowhere for us to congregate."

One last chance for area roller skaters

While the future of roller skating in the area is unclear, one option exists for women skaters: Lowcountry Highrollers Derby, a local women's roller derby team. It's offering a meet-and-greet Thursday.

Highrollers president Traci Doutaz of Ladson remembers going to Music in Motion often between 2015 and 2017 after Hot Wheels Skate Center closed.

"For beginners, it's super important to have a roller rink to learn not only because the floor is amazing, but [it] also has skates to borrow," she said. "Roller skating is not the easiest hobby to just pick up and not having a local roller rink and its community just takes that option away for a lot of people."

Doutaz joined Highrollers in 2010, and she said it was popular up until about 2015 when the group lost its bout venue at The Citadel. Then Covid-19 hit and roller skating blew up, Doutaz said, so there was renewed interest in Highrollers. After more than a year of searching, North Charleston Coliseum offered the group a space to practice and hold bouts currently. The closest roller derby club for men is in Columbia, she said.

Doutaz has been roller skating for almost 30 years. She worked her first job as a carhop on skates at a Sonic in Kentucky.

"Emotionally it's my escape," she said. "It's how I deal with things. It's my happy place. I'm more comfortable with wheels on my feet than anything else."

The Highrollers group offers a haven for women skaters who need to be shown the ropes.

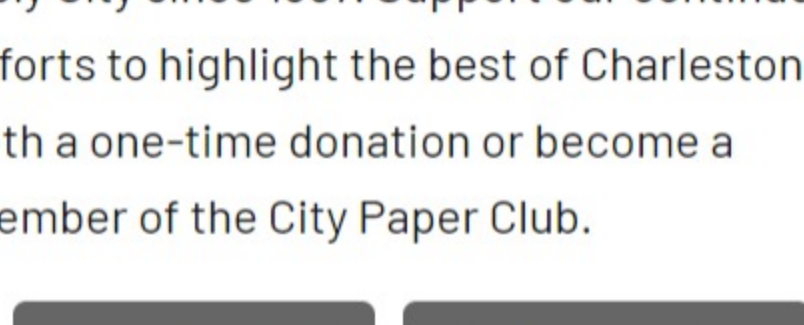
"We will teach you everything: how to skate and how to fall," Doutaz said. "You can show us even if you have never put skates on before."

Lowcountry Highrollers Derby is hosting a meet-and-greet 6-9 p.m. Aug. 25 at Rusty Bull in North Charleston.



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