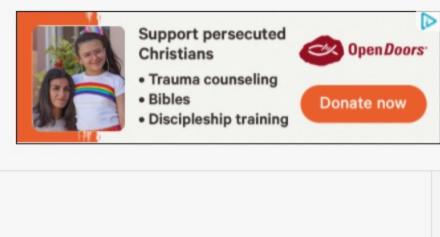
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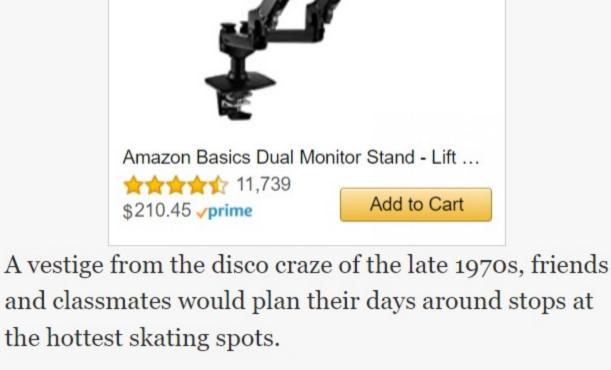
LOCAL NEWS In the 1980s, the flashing lights, fluorescent lasers and

Rink memories



pop music made roller skating rinks hugely popular among teenagers across the country.





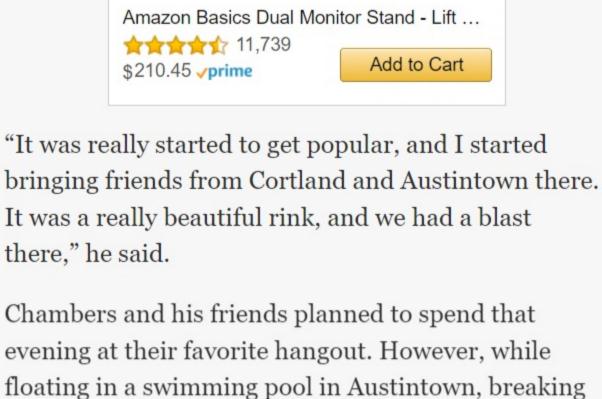
the Strip Roller Rink in Niles was the premier afterschool hangout. It was destroyed by a killer tornado in May 31, 1985.

For many youths around Trumbull County, the Top O'

For the past four years, friends who used to hang out at the rink have gathered annually to reminisce. "That was the pinnacle of roller skating in this area, when everything went to lasers," said Robert

Chambers, who worked at the Top O' the Strip during

his teenage years.



news on a nearby radio caught his ear.

odd electricity in the air.

looking strange."

path.

remembers. "It was hard to believe, because the weather was fine where I was." At around the same time, Cindy Weiss Rogers, who had also planned to go skating at the rink that night, was near Robbins Avenue in Niles when she felt an

"It was like nothing I have ever felt before and just

"Everyone was concerned and the skies started

really weird," the now 41-year-old Weiss Rogers said.

"They said there was a bad storm in Newton Falls

headed toward Niles, and to get indoors," Chambers

At about 6:30 p.m., a funnel cloud touched down in Portage County, churning its way toward Newton Falls and Niles. The F5 tornado ripped through the area, staying on

the ground for 47 miles, devastating everything in its

It is believed that 300 mph winds swirled inside the

twister, which would have made it the largest tornado

in the world that year. When it was over, 10 people in Ohio and eight in Western Pennsylvania had perished. Most of the

victims in Trumbull County died when the twister

roared down on the Niles Park Plaza on U.S. Route

422 near Vienna Avenue.

and more than 65 others were damaged severely. Damage estimates put losses at more than \$60 million. Among the scattered wreckage in the massive debris field left in the storm's wake, Top O' the Strip was leveled.

"It was amazing, because everything was fine until you

got to around North Road and (state Route) 169," the

Chambers said he could not believe his eyes.

Nearly 70 houses were destroyed in six communities,

Now, nearly three decades later, local skaters have spent the past several years remembering the destroyed rink in an annual remembrance, reuniting

old friends and celebrating 1980s popular culture.

The idea first began four years ago when a group of

friends on Facebook were reminiscing about the Top

O' the Strip.

1982 Mineral Ridge graduate said. "It looked like

someone dropped a bomb. Everything was gone."

"We had some pictures devoted to the rink and the tornado, and people started suggesting doing something and getting together," Weiss Rogers said. "Everybody jumped on board."

This year's remembrance is set to take place from 7 to

1980s-themed gathering. This marks the first year the

10 p.m. Saturday at the Cortland Roller Rink.

Rogers is expecting a crowd of around 200 at the

event is open to children, but not an open skate.

"We basically rent the rink for the day, since they're normally not open on Saturdays," Rogers said. The event will feature door prizes from the 1980s trivia, songs and prizes will be awarded at the end of

the event. All children must be accompanied by an

adult in order to attend the reunion.

"We do it to remember the rink and all the fun we had there and to just get old friends together," Weiss Rogers said. "It's a good time." anewman@tribtoday.com

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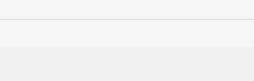
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well.



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