

Scottie's in Illinois Goes from Skating Rink to Full- Fledged FEC

After operating successfully for more than seven decades, you might think the oldest family-owned roller skating rink in the United States would be satisfied to sit comfortably in place and not embark on any risky new ventures, especially during tough economic times. That is not the case with Scottie's Skateland in Quincy, Illinois.

The facility celebrated its 75th anniversary in June, just months after opening a \$2.3 million, 15,000-squarefoot expansion that turned it into a fullfledged family entertainment center (FEC), now named Scottie's Fun Spot.

Jeff Scott, the FEC's general manager and the grandson of Albert Scott, who founded Scottie's Skateland in 1936, says going from a skating rink to an FEC was an idea that just kept popping up.

"We were going to the roller skating trade shows and they were all adding laser tag or play areas to their facilities," he says, "so we looked at that and it kind of grew into what it's become now. It just kind of snowballed because the area needed a full-fledged fun center."

So he and his parents, Bob and Jan Scott, who own the facility, commissioned a feasibility study with Jerry Merola of Alpha-Omega Amusements. Despite the study's positive results, securing financing as a small business was tough during a recession. "We just never gave up," says Scott. "We believed in our project and in the feasibility study, which was well worth the money, and we finally found a banker that thought the community also needed a project like this."

Because the Scotts had to start the expansion more modestly than would be necessary in a strong economy with easier financing, it was important that they selected the right attractions from the start. "We attended Foundations [Entertainment University] to give us a start in the process, then hired Jerry Merola," says Scott. "We also went to the IAAPA show and to a lot of other FECs, and talked to other promoters. We went to places that had the Ballocity play systems, and I took my kids to see what they thought of it."



In the end, the attractions they settled on included a two-story Ballocity play area from Prime Play; Highway 66 mini-bowling from QubicaAMF; a 3,700-square-foot laser tag arena from Zone Systems; Spin Zone bumper cars from American Products; a Laser Frenzy laser maze; and a 65-game arcade. Scott says the FEC also went with an Embed debit card system and notes that Scottie's Fun Spot is one of only a few FECs that allow guests to choose whether or not to use redemption tickets.

Amid all of the progress, one thing that has not changed at Scottie's is a strictly enforced code of behavior to maintain a safe family atmosphere. The FEC does not allow muscle shirts, baggy pants, bandannas, hoodies with the hoods up, foul language, or borrowing money from other patrons. "My grandfather had a lot of 'tough ship' rules!" asserts Scott. "On a Friday night, we keep a book on kids we kick out, and if we have to call a deputy, we take a picture and put them in a book."

Scott says his only real concern now is that the operation has no outdoor attractions. So in 2012, the facility will embark on the second phase of its expansion, which will include go-karts and minigolf.