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New era to begin at Knight Center

Rubber City Rollergirls to hold home season
at site better known for speeches, conventions

By Bill Lilley

Beacon Journal staff writer

Officials of the John S. Knight Center are proud to rattle off the roll call of dignitaries who have passed through its doors since it opened in 1994.

President George H.W. Bush. President Bill Clinton. Sen. Barack Obama. Gen. Colin Powell. Countless CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and presidents of universities.

Thousands have attended the local home and garden show, annual Holiday Tree Festival and, recently, a financial fair.

Now, management is interested in more diversification - to the rough-and-tumble sport of roller derby.

Eighty-SixHer, Amy Animal, Barbonic Plague, Agent Skullie and the 11 other Rubber City Rollergirls will be calling the convention hall home for their first season in a new league that ultimately will be sanctioned by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association.

"This will be different, very different, for us," said Dirk Breiding, vice president of sales at the Knight Center. "We're a multi-functional building and we've had athletic events - cheerleading and gymnastics - here before, but nothing like roller derby."

He said the Saturday-evening event, which lasts two to three hours, could be good for downtown.

Please see **Roller, A7**



PHIL MASTURZO/Akron Beacon Journal

Roller

Rollergirls will skate on hall's concrete floor

Continued from Page A1

The Rubber City Rollergirls already are convinced that playing in the Knight Center will be great.

The architecture and stately nature of the building turned the skaters on immediately.

"It's a beautiful place, it's simply gorgeous," said Field High School graduate Amy Mullens, (aka Amy Animal) a human resources specialist for Kmart.

And the location is perfect.

"We needed to find a facility that was big enough to put in the track," said Kenmore High School graduate Tracy Soulsby, CPA by day, Eighty-SixHer in skates by night. "There just aren't that many places around that we can do this in.

"And we were determined to find that place in downtown Akron. We wanted to be centrally located in Akron because we are the Rubber City Rollergirls and we need to be downtown."

Exhibit Hall 1 in the Knight Center provided the necessary room. The hall has 14,400 square feet of open space, and 14,240 more square feet of space are readily available if needed.

It can easily handle the track, which is 108 feet long by 73 feet wide. The track is not the banked, wooden oval track of previous generations. It is a flat track that will have taped-down rope to create the lanes the women skate within.

The women will be skating directly on the polished con-

SCHEDULE

Rubber City Roller Girls' home schedule for 2009:

**April 18, May 9, June 20,
July 25, Aug. 22**

crete floor of the Knight Center.

"Obviously, it won't give as much as a sportcourt floor does when you fall," said Northwest High School graduate Tracy Phillips, a nursing assistant at Aultman Hospital who lives in Massillon. "But roller derby is supposed to be a tough sport and it's a small price to pay to play in an unbelievable place like this."

There will be one match on a Saturday night in April, May, June, July and August.

Breiding said about 500 seats can be installed in Exhibit Hall 1. And, if the need arises, the doors to Exhibit Hall 2 can be opened for more seating.

Soulsby, who serves as public relations director for the fledgling group, is optimistic that Akron will embrace the Rubber City Rollergirls.

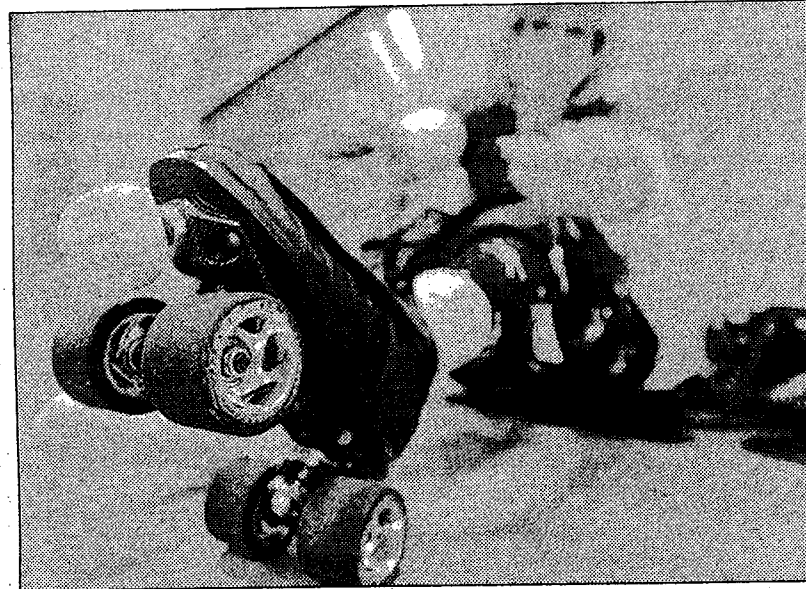
She said they will start with a setup of 500 seats, which will include a VIP area and a special suicide seating zone directly on the floor, inside the required 10-foot safety zone for those who prefer a direct feel of the competition. The team has not set prices for tickets.

"There won't be any tickets above \$15 and we'll have special pricing for children," Soulsby said. "We're a true sport, honest competition. It's not like the roller derby people watched on TV 30 to 40 years ago. I'm confident people are going to love what we're doing."

"We wanted to bring new blood downtown," Phillips said. "And that's in a literal sense as well because although we're a



Ron Mullens (left) and Chris Soulsby prepare the floor. At left, skating are (from left) Amy Mullens, Tracy Phillips, Tracy Soulsby and Jan Miller.



Amy Mullens, aka Amy Animal, laces up at the John S. Knight Center, where the Rubber City Rollergirls will compete.

serious sport, it does get rough out there at times and it's always high energy, kind of rock 'n' roll on skates."

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