

THE Wheels

Keep on TURNING

Roller disco, trick skates for thieves create popular displays in museum

BY JULIE ABRAHAMSON
Staff Reporter

Think "Xanadu," circa 1980. The movie, starring Olivia Newton-John, is a classic portrayal of the ensuing decade: It's about roller skating.

Like the movie, most people think of the sport as another fad of the era. Yet, after visiting the National Museum of Roller Skating, 4730 South St., patrons may realize roller skating didn't run the course of macramé, but rather, constitutes a substantial part of pop culture history.

The museum features an impressive collection of roller skates, a hall of fame containing photographs of coaches and athletes and various roller skating memorabilia. Among them are postcards, award medallions, stickers, costumes and paintings of roller skaters.

Moreover, the museum holds the largest collection of roller skate products in the world, said director and curator Michael Zaidman.

The museum's founders established the United States Amateur Confederation of Roller Skating in Detroit. However, after numerous visits to Lincoln for the National Roller Skating Championships, they moved the association here, changing the group's name to the Roller Skating Association.

In 1980, they founded the National Museum of Roller Skating. The museum is currently the only one of its kind, Zaidman said.

Normally, 15 to 20 people visit the museum weekly, but every summer during the Regional Roller Skating Championships, the museum draws 1,500 to 2,000 visitors. Also, local elementary schools occasionally visit the museum.

With all the different styles of

roller skates displayed, the museum may seem like a creative extension of a roller rink such as Lincoln's Holiday Skateworld.

One very popular booth features roller disco, Zaidman said. This display features a pair of white roller skates with enormous pompoms attached to the toes. Next to the roller skates hangs a 1970s-style red and yellow T-shirt with a sparkly roller skating iron-on logo. A button on the booth — that when pressed — plays a clip of the Village People song "YMCA," which is still a popular song at roller rinks.

Due to the popularity of the exhibit and the song, the recording has been warped because of constant play.

Antique and modern skates fill other display cases, featuring items such as a 1760s photograph of Joseph Merlin.

Merlin took a pair of ice skates and replaced the blade with five in-line wheels, therefore inventing the first in-line skates.

Featured in another exhibit are the first pair of in-lines skates to receive a patent. The skates date back to France, 1819. Furthermore, the booth contains a photograph and description of James L. Plimpton, the "father of roller skating." In 1863, Plimpton invented the quad skate, the typical four-wheel model of roller skate.

Zaidman said people preferred Plimpton's skates because they provided more stability than in-line skates.

Interesting exhibits lace the entire museum. For instance, one booth contains the museum's most unusual skates, including a motorized skate, which rolls along at speeds up to 30 mph.

International skating is the theme for yet another booth. Skates from Germany, Great Britain and Israel

adorn the display case, which features a sleek pair of red platform sandals with wheels built into the soles of the shoes, and a lever attached to the sandal acting as a wheel release.

The trick skates were used by a roller-skating jewelry thief in an episode of the television series, "CHIPS" which enjoyed success during the peak of roller skating popularity.

Various sports displays contain speed and roller hockey skates, some of which were donated by athletes or skating companies. Photos of a 1920s roller basketball team occupy a booth as well.

Sarah Webber, assistant curator, said her work at the museum cataloging

pieces and organizing displays made her feel like a part of roller skating's rich heritage.

"Most of what I do involves history," Webber said.

Currently, Webber is working on an exhibit about movies featuring roller skating.

Zaidman said the display would include a focus on the film "Xanadu" and feature a floor plan, set design



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

exhibit will run from Dec. 1, 1997 through June 1, 1998.

Meanwhile, for those left in Lincoln, free tours are offered the first Friday of every month at 12:15 p.m.

"The museum has an incredible history," Webber said. "Even if you don't know a lot about roller skating, you should go. It's very interesting."

Regular museum hours are Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and admission is free.

Technical tricks can't save movie

BY GERRY BELTZ
Film Critic

Movie Review

Ah, that old trick! The "globetrotting-nuclear-weapon-on-American-soil-by-remorseful-music-teacher" formula strikes again — this time in "The Peacemaker."

Director Mimi Leder takes a break from directing TV movies and episodes of "ER" to take the helm of the first feature film from Dream Works — a production conglomerate of Steven Spielberg, David Geffen and Jeffrey Katzenberg — and is fortunate enough to have some talented people to work with, like Nicole Kidman and current co-worker, George Clooney.

Still, formula is formula, and pretty much everything is by the book, with a

few surprises. Nuclear expert Julia Kelly (Kidman) is thrust into a situation headfirst and can barely keep up, while ultra-realist Colonel Thomas Davoe (Clooney) gives her lessons on how things are done in the "real world" of wheeling and dealing in order to get the information.

Together, along with some neat technical heely-hooter thingamabobs, the two must learn to cope with each other to find and stop the detonation of a nuclear bomb.

A major problem with "The Peacemaker" is the beginning. Here's a hint: Consume caffeine. The beginning of this film makes the O.J. trial look like

swift justice. Either bring a pillow or stab yourself in the arm or leg periodically to stay awake.

Good thing: no romantic involvement here. These two feed off of each other in an intellectual manner, each fighting their own personal battles as the film progresses.

"The Peacemaker" is more drama and suspense than out-and-out action. The car chase provides possibly the best action sequence of the film and is better than the average chase scene due to unexpected realism (actual reasons for cars exploding, intelligent tactics and so forth).

It was also nice to see the snipers of a film screw-up for once, and not be

Please see NUCLEAR on 10

Darwin awards honor odd deaths

BY SEAN MCCARTHY
Internet Critic

Whether you call it natural selection or the thinning of the gene pool, life-threatening faux pas bring to light morons who make Gerald Ford look like Fred Astaire.

And no one celebrates these duffers better than the annual Darwin Awards.

By far, the awards' official World Wide Web site is one of the funniest sites you will find.

Located at <http://officialdarwinawards.com/>, the site includes tales of people meeting their untimely fates in funny and often undignified ways.

Last year's recipient went to a Toronto lawyer who died while demonstrating the safety of win-

Please see DARWIN on 10