

# Ice skating rink draws shoppers to midtown

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**Published Wednesday, Dec. 23, 2009**

It was a great day to skate, and shop, as it turned out.

They glided across the ice, tottered and wobbled on their skates, and on a midtown street-turned-frozen pond Tuesday found an alternative to the crowded holiday shopping mall.

Mia Mull of Natomas was one. She stood in line with a friend's young daughters in tow, waiting for a turn on the ice and planning a full day of skating, shopping and lunch.

"We're avoiding the mall, so we thought we'd come to J Street. We're shopping local," Mull said. "I think a lot of people are trying to be conscious of keeping local money local. We'll go to a few places, have a little fun, go to lunch, maybe a trip to the chocolate store."

Folks like Mull are exactly the ones businesspeople in Sacramento's midtown hope the rink will draw.

The skating rink at 20th Street between J and K streets has become a holiday hub in midtown since making its debut in front of the MARRS retail and restaurant complex last month.

Even though she lives in Natomas, Mull said she's "adopted" the neighborhood and its small businesses.

"While they're in midtown, there are places they may not have noticed if a rink wasn't here," said Janis Lott, co-owner of Newsbeat, a 20th Street newsstand. "You hope that it's good for everybody and hope that it generates enthusiasm for the district itself."

Some 1,100 skaters flooded the ice on Saturday, and about 500 were expected on a sunny, winter-crisp Tuesday, said rink manager Ali Magnani.

Some days have been so busy that the rink's clerks have had a hard time keeping its 350 pairs of skates on the shelves. The rink is sponsored by the Midtown Business Association.

"Business (on the ice) has picked up with the kids out of school, and the businesses know that it's helped a lot," Magnani said. "A lot of people are happy that it's here."

Officials at Downtown Sacramento Partnership, the downtown business group, know the feeling.

The rink was moved from its longtime home at Seventh and K streets this year because of a city renovation project. It normally sees upwards of 20,000 skaters a year during its annual November-to-January run, said Lisa Martinez, the partnership's director of marketing.

The rink will return downtown in 2010.

"It has been a great holiday event for us downtown," Martinez said.

Whether the rink will produce higher receipts for midtown businesses this year remains to be seen, but at the popular pizza eatery Luigi's Slice, which sits next to the ice rink, staffers during the lunch rush said they were too busy to talk.

Many of the customers were parents and children fresh off the rink.

Luigi's regular Kim Tucker, a director at a midtown marketing firm, saw the connection.

"I liked how busy it was. This is a good idea if it's bringing business downtown," she said. "And if this lunch crowd is any indication, it is."

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