

Our Alumni in the News

The Little Factory in McEwen that Makes Ice Skates



Hi, skater folks! If you know of any who would be interested in helping to fund Bill's initiatives, please let me know. (And do at least read this insightful article. In the show, I used SP-Teri boots).

Located at 55 High St. W. in McEwen, right by the town's water tower and on Meriwether Lewis Electric Cooperative's lines, sits a 30,000-square-foot factory building that has a rich history. Built after World War II in 1947, the factory was a major employer in Humphreys County for many years, employing up to 350 workers at a time and was home to Washington Manufacturing and then OshKosh B'gosh until 2000 when it became a warehouse and remained unchanged ... until now.

The Little Factory in McEwen is the relatively new home of ice skating boot manufacturer SP-Teri, and Bill Fauver has big plans not only for SP-Teri but for the factory as well.

SP-Teri moved from California to Tennessee in 2019 when Bill took over leadership of the company as its president. He describes SP-Teri as a traditional, handcrafted ice skating boot maker. A lot of the company's customers are amateur competitors, but even past Olympic skaters are in SP-Teri's consumer base.

[Click here to read the article](#)

The Old Smoothies



Pittsburgh native John H. Harris knew he was on to something when he saw the hockey crowd at Duquesne Garden's enthusiastic response to the figure skater he hired to perform between periods. Though not the first ice show, Ice Capades, which Harris owned and debuted in 1940, became the longest-lasting traveling ice show in the country before ending in the 1990s.

Although many of the acts were performed by former world champion skaters, it was a pair of gliding grandparents that proved to be an audience favorite through the first 20 years of the show. Hired by Harris and dubbed "The Old Smoothies", the skating duo, who performed from the 1940s through the 1960s, met when Irma Thomas, a St. Paul housewife, hired Orrin Markhus to teach her how to golf.

Orrin had experience as both a professional golfer and ice skater. When not performing around the world, he taught golf in the summer and ice skating in the winter. Orrin convinced Irma to give ice skating a try, and she proved to be a natural. She jumped at the chance to perform professionally with her teacher.

For years they performed as "The Smoothest Pair on Ice" before signing a contract for one year, with an option, for the Ice Capades in 1942. The option continued and the pair became regulars. Their performance remained relatively the same through the years, a five-minute graceful glide on the ice to traditional waltz music, Orrin in his white tailcoats and Irma in a flowing gown. Their fine-tuned simple act (they fell only seven times in the first ten years) proved to be immensely popular.

They had their share of injuries as they aged, but neither of them missed any of their 7,000 shows. After a series of health issues, the duo retired in 1964 at 72 and 65. They were married in 1966 after the passing of Irma's first husband. They lived out their retirement in Victorville, Ca. until Orrin's passing in 1979 and Irma's in 1995.

Recollecting Interesting Stories from the Hood

With Dave Pitts & Spanky in the news recently, thought you'd like to hear first-hand from some of our skaters who had experienced Dave & Spanky up close.





Jim Custer - In 1966, the National show introduced the large stair case, and wood slides. We also had a large stage where dancers, (without skates), danced. Because of my trampoline act, with Vic Zobel and not having to skate every number, I was asked to help Dave with his Spanky number. I was more than willing to help Dave because we were friends. Well, Dave wanted to start the act by having Spanky come down that wood slide to the ice. Guess what,

Spanky, the original Spanky, who to me looked like a very unhappy dwarf ape, did not want to go down that wood slide. I was to give him a gentle push at the top of the slide, to get him started. Dave never shared with me the unhappy experience he must have had earlier pushing him down the slide. So, I tried at the top of the slide to give Spanky a little push to help him go down the slide. He turned around, showed his teeth, and made a sound like someone would make, having a colonoscopy without anesthesia. There was no way I was going to try to push him again. I yelled down to [Dave Pitts](#) on the ice, "hey Dave, this is not going to work". A memory of my working as close to a zoo attendant as I ever want to be.

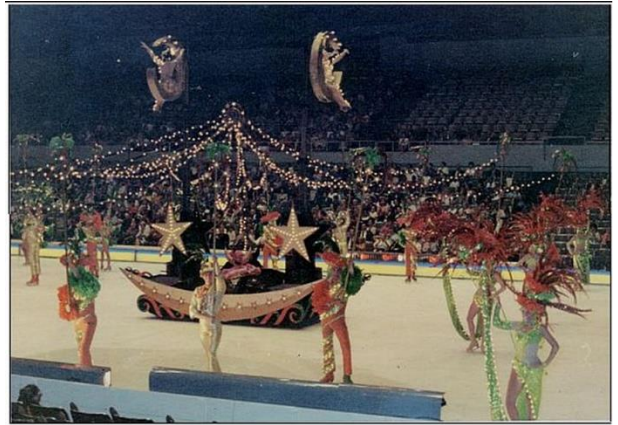
Jim Hurst was in this act (Ric Prada and I were to set and strike the fire hoop that Spanky would jump through!!). Early in the 1971 West Co. tour the act was fired because Spanky was dangerous and uncontrollable and would go wild during a performance. At least that's how I remember it; I don't think the act ever came back again.

Sonja Burling Polson - I do remember the one time that Spanky took off from the act and went into the audience. At the time I didn't realize how dangerous that was. Dave seemed so in control of the situation and I actually remember that in the first few minutes I laughed and thought it was part of the act...soon realized it wasn't!!!

Melva Hurt - I remember working with Dave and Spanky in the show. I remember Atlantic City rehearsals for the New York opening at Madison Square Garden. That was the year when both shows switched tours. We had rehearsals every day and sometimes Spanky got a little wild in his cage. It was back behind the set and you could hear the cage rattling. That movie should be interesting. I had heard something about it previously.

Synnové Reilly - I am also remembering the show that was Spanky's last was when he attacked Dave on the ice, he was jumping up to bite his neck, then Spanky went over the stage right dash and into the audience!! Fortunately, he didn't harm anyone. Dave was yelling at Ric and me to get off the ice which we did right away!!

Pamela Dinet - I remember skating in the show with Dave and Spanky! He had a young chimp called Marvin If I recall that he was training as well. Before going out for the finale bows, I was strapped into a **Huge Calypso boat** waiting to be pushed out on the ice with special effects for the finale. Dave would be backstage ice waiting to go out for his bow and the chimps would come by and try to swing on my legs. Dave had to pry them off some nights but it felt strange being buckled in a prop with chimps clinging to your legs 🙄🙄🙄🙄 They were never Frightening though and Dave could always get them back in line quickly.



WGN _TV Interview with Dave's son – Jonathan Pitts
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SmFOGRJ0Tw>

Videos of the Month

Bill Blackburn's Treasure Chest

Rare Home Movies and Special Memories Part 1& 2

Bill Blackburn skated seven years with Holiday on Ice and **2 years with Ice Capades**. In 1955 he skated in Sonja Henie's TV spectacular in New York. He was the oriental sultan in the Nutcracker, and in the Hills Hotel skating show for Bill Turner productions.



He was on the original Star Trek playing a lot of different things. The Gorn, the Rabbit in Shore Leave, robot, and was a regular as the navigator for its entire run of three years.

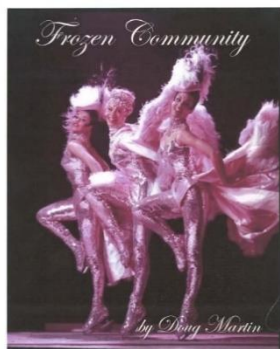
He also took movies with his super eight-and eight-millimetre camera. which he later was signed to a contract by CBS and the footage is on all three seasons of blue ray and regular DVD's.

Here are 2 parts of some home movies that Bill took while he was on Star Trek.

Part 1 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYQ3YelrNlg>

Part 2 - https://youtu.be/jYkkFXibsv0?si=RPw_XLYC12me6SMB

RELIVING FOND MEMORIES



Doug Martin had published two books called 'Frozen Community' where he wanted to have skaters tell funny stories about their time on the road. Stories were posted before but worth sharing again.

Here's a great memory from Pinky & when she skated adagio with Doug. The year was **1964** and we were in Atlantic City. The show was "Masquerade," "Circus," "Cole Porter," "Annapolettes," "Viva Italia," and the beloved 'Hallelujah Finale,' which was our exit march. We were waiting backstage at the top of a stairway, which was part of the set. We were to make our entrance by descending the stairs through billowing clouds of fog. We'd get to the bottom, the rush backstage and hurry up the steps again to make another entrance, so it looked like a million girls coming down those steps doing what we called the "Hallelujah hand pump" – down with the hands covered in snow which gloves, up with the hands way over our heads, and all the time the spot lights were ballyhooing all over the place. The short girls were back by the set, we were down on our left knee with our right toe pick planted firmly in the ice in showgirl fashion, and the fog keeps rolling and rolling and rolling. The stagehands were rocking it that night, because as we descended the stairs and moved towards the front, we'd drag the fog with us and it would dissipate too quickly. Soooo, "**More Fog, George!**" Peanuts leaned over to me just before the big "Ta Da!" as we were doing the Hallelujah hand pump, and said, "If we can't see the audience, you know they can't see us." So we crawled backstage on our hands and knees, grabbed our skate guards, and flew into the dressing room. We were out of costume and into street clothes in a flash, and trucking out of the dressing room while everyone else was just coming off the ice. Who knows where we were going in such a big fat hurry. Probably darting off for a good seat at the "Church" the nickname given to a popular bar in Atlantic Cit. Oh, I didn't say that, did I?

That went on for a couple of nights, until one evening, while crawling off the ice, we crawled right up onto a pair of shoes, and one of those shoes was tap, tap, tapping. We both looked up to see who it was, and oh, my stars, it was none other than **Shirley Costello**, the head program director. Oh, oh, we were aught like two mice in a trap. She didn't say a word, she just raised her arm and pointed back to the set. Ever see a crawdad scurry? That's exactly what we did, a backwards crawl, onto the ice, into the fog, to finish the number. No question, we got the Morse Code message her show was tapping out. "Get back out there and don't ever do that again!

Someone had to have told her. There's no way she saw us scooting off the ice through all that fog. We couldn't even see our own stark which gloves in the air above our head. Dang it, we had a good thing going there for awhile. Ha, ha, ha.

Let's keep Doug's legacy going. I'm sure there are more 'interesting' stories out there from your time in the show. If you would like to share, please send them to me.

Pictures from Past Reunions

[All Skater's Reunion – May 1-3, 2023 Las Vegas](#)

[Ice Capades 2022 Reunion pictures](#)

Reunion News

Ice Capades 2025 Reunion Cruise Announcement

'Escapades 2025 Cruise'.... We'll have a good time! 🎵🎵



Please click below to join the [Escapades 2025 Cruise – events page](#) and get all updates relating to the cruise.

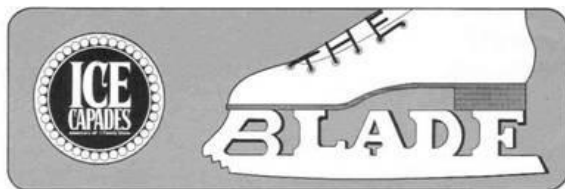
<https://facebook.com/events/s/ice-capades-escapades-cruise-a/746073810575573/>

THIS EVENT IS BEING CREATED AND COORDINATED BY Johnna "J" Bates...

NOTE: PASSPORTS ARE REQUIRED!

[Click here for more Reunion information](#)

Questions: Contact 'J' directly - dabatej@bellsouth.net



The website, www.icecapadestheblade.com has been revamped and more information has been added. If you have something to add, please send them.

Look here for **2022 Ice Capades Reunion** information, including reunion pictures

Cast, Precision & Production Pictures – Relive some memories.

Past reunion Pictures – Check them out for some you may have missed.

Rosters – Looking for someone or remembering who you skated with in the show?

Video links – have been collecting skating 'You Tube' links from the early years.

Program Covers – we had the most beautiful covers

Past Issues of The Blade – just in case you missed an issue

Past Reunion Pictures – relive the times you attended the reunions
In Memorium – remembering those who have left us too soon
Check it out!

Upcoming Events



CELEBRATING THE JOY
OF DANCING ON ICE

Ice Theatre of New York, Inc®
presents

<https://www.icetheatre.org/>

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