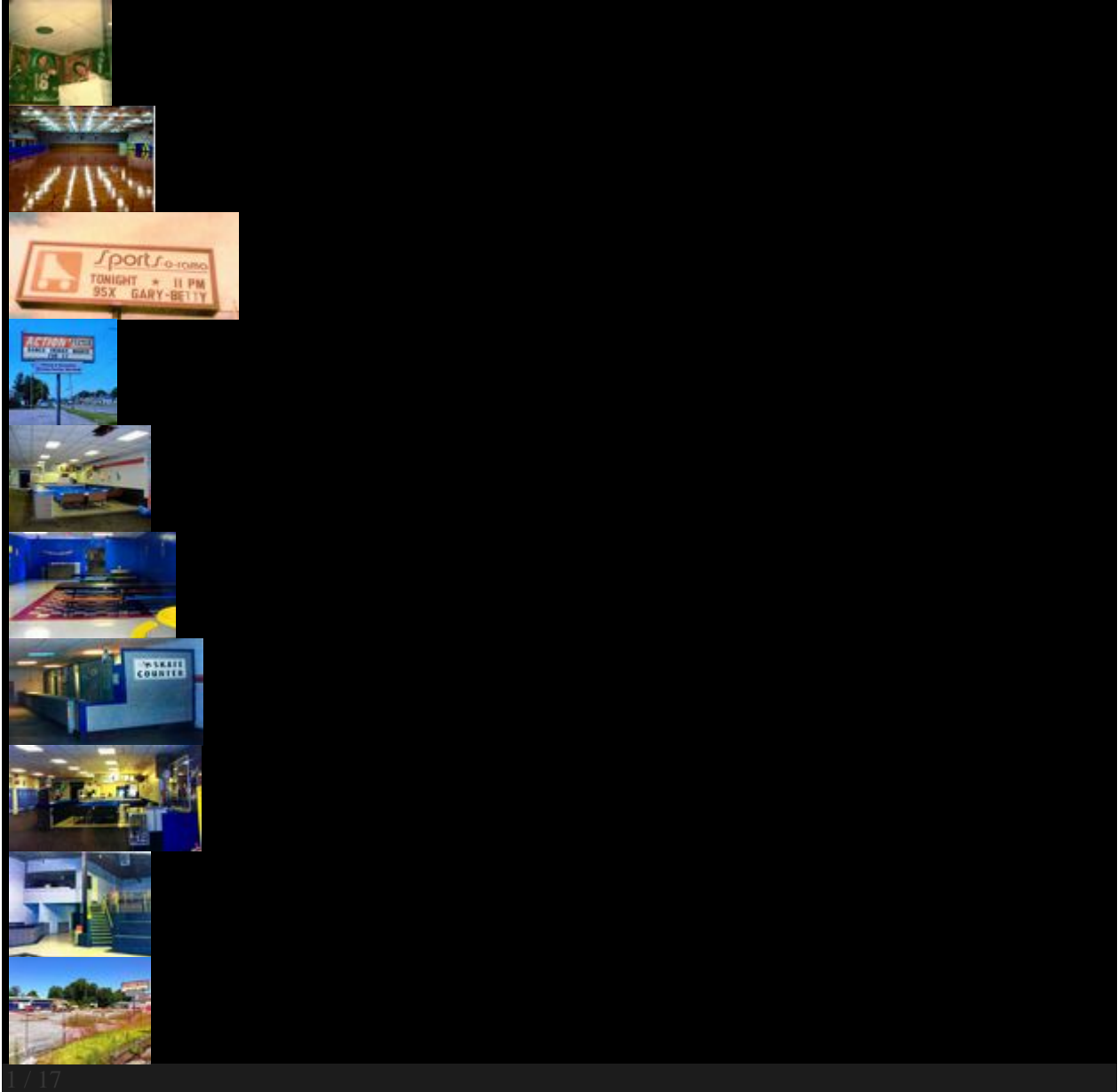


# News of Sports-O-Rama demolition sparks flood of memories, nostalgia (photos)







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A view of the skating floor at the Sports-O-Rama rink in 1983. Photo provided by Onondaga Historical Association.

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**Salina, N.Y. — On her 18th birthday, a friend invited Jean Frateschi to the Sports-O-Rama roller skating rink in Mattydale.**

She didn't know how to skate. And she certainly didn't know she would end up meeting her husband that night 52 years ago.

"There he was," said Frateschi, who now lives in Florida. "Just like he was floating on air on his wheels and around he went."

Seven months later, the couple married. They ended up with three kids and 10 grandchildren.

The Sports-O-Rama is now being **demolished**. Current owner Byrne Dairy plans to sell the site. The rink closed several years ago.

The building is on Route 11, next to Pizza Hut.

The place still means something to Frateschi, although she said she never did get the hang of skating. Her husband, Francis, always had to hold her up. He died in February.

Memories like Frateschi's are common among those who visited the rink in its heyday.

After news of the building's demolition broke in July, Syracuse.com readers recounted dates, birthday parties and countless good nights with friends in emails, phone calls, social media posts and comments.

The rink was first built in 1959. The property is the previous site of Rose Lawn, childhood home of L. Frank Baum, author of the Wizard of Oz, according to research by Thomas Mafri, town historian in Cicero.

Sports-O-Rama drew thousands to its skating floor in the 1970s and 1980s under owner Howard Baird, who bought it in 1970.

When Baird first purchased it, the business had pool tables and go-karts along with skating, said Pamela Baird-Mengel, Baird's daughter.

But Baird bought the rink just as roller skating was starting to boom across the country. He put the focus squarely on skating and the business took off, said Baird-Mengel, who now lives in Florida.

The rink drew thousands of people on weekend nights, she said. So many people showed up that the skate rental counter would run out of some sizes.

"It was just so crowded you didn't have time to think," she said.

Baird-Mengel started working at the rink's snack bar at age 11. She would later own the business after her father's death in 1991.

She even lived in the building for about a year. Baird converted a portion of it into an apartment in the mid-1970s while he and his family shopped for a new home on Oneida Lake.

Marjorie Sherman grew up in Kirkville and was a frequent visitor to Sports-O-Rama. She remembers the lines well. They stretched out the door at times.

In fact, Sherman said one of her most vivid memories of the rink is the anticipation she felt before getting inside.

"The sense of butterflies, I can still feel," said Sherman, who now lives in South Carolina. "I'll have it forever."

Sherman said she was a bit shy in her early teens, but one night at Sports-O-Rama, she asked a boy to skate with her to a favorite song. They dated for a few months and stayed in touch for 10 years.

"It kind of helped me become who I am," she said of the rink. "It brought me out of my shell."

Sports-O-Rama was later known as Dance-N-Skate, when it added a dance floor, and Action Sports & Skate, when it added basketball courts and hosted various leagues.

But skating was always a central part of its offering.

Mark Colvin of Fayetteville began skating at the rink at age 9 and later worked at the business and was a manager.

Sports-O-Rama regulars known as "rink rats" often didn't fit in anywhere else, Colvin said.

"A lot of kids spent a lot of their life there because they could come and be themselves," he said. "They weren't judged."

A combination of expensive upkeep and a souring economy helped spell the end for the rink, Baird-Mengel said.

"It was just so much fun," she said. "It changed every minute. All these people would come. It gave them some place to go."

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