



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



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Rollin' Old School: Dow's Roller Rink of Nelsonville



Roger and Helen Smith have owned and operated Dow's Rollarena for over 50 years. Originally built in 1952 by Dow McCune, it remains an active part of the regional community by providing fun on eight wheels. Located just outside Nelsonville city limits, people come from nearby villages like Chauncey and The Plains and from further away like Lancaster and Pomeroy. Roger's experience has been that Nelsonville is a friendly, pleasant community easy to do business with, but it is one of many that support the rollarena.

Operation of the business is full-time for the Smiths. They took over the business from Helen's first husband's uncle in 1964 when the rollarena was the place to be seen. Offering open skate nights on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, the other days of the week are booked with private parties, school groups, and church gatherings. Originally heated with a coal furnace, there is a modern heating system that keeps them busy throughout the winter, but summer is slower because school is out. Roger is fine with that—he'd rather the kids be enjoying the outdoors anyhow. To keep it simple, they handle requests solely by telephone.

Like many businesses in the area, advertising has been a challenge. Years ago they tried newspaper advertisements, radio spots, and a rare television ad; none had much success. In a building that used to host sock hops with live music and dancing, it has been difficult to build rapport with the younger generations. These days young people are likely to be online, and that is somewhere Roger avoids (though Dow's does have a [Facebook](#) page). After 50 years running a rollarena, Roger has observed that kids are less likely to engage with others and try something new. He prefers word-of-mouth advertising and wants his customers talking with each other.

That said, he and Helen like what they do and they plan on running the business until further notice. Though neither skate these days, it was a former pastime they shared. Their brood is expanding this year with their 10th great-grandchild on the way, so when the time comes they are certain Dow's will stay in the family and continue to operate. He's leaving it up to his roller-heir to skate into the online world. "I enjoy having a place where the kids can come and have fun and get some exercise," he said. "If we didn't enjoy it, we wouldn't be here."

Businesses like Roger's are a valuable part of the community worth supporting. The Rollarena in particular provides a safe, fun gathering place for family and friends while maintaining a connection to the history of the area. Learn more online, or better yet, visit in person on a Thursday, Saturday or Sunday for open skate. Admission is \$4, skate rentals are \$2, good times are priceless.

