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EDITOR'S NOTE



Roller rink revival

BY **FOON RHEE** / foonr@newsreview.com



Pastor Les Simmons wants
a safe space with some swag.

PHOTO BY FOON RHEE

costs of the new Simmons Community Center, which will boast a basketball court, a skating rink around it and a video game room.

Simmons sees it as a “safe space” for young people and a community gathering place—as it was when he used to roller skate there in seventh grade—but with some “swag” for the new generation. He hopes to open the center at least six days a week, draw 150 to 200 youths a day and offer a wide range of health and social programs.

It could also boost the community’s economy. Simmons plans to hire at least a dozen youths and young adults as skate attendants, basketball referees and snack bar and custodial staff.

While it’s only the latest project for Simmons, he told me that of all his accomplishments, “this is number one.”

And he’s done a lot.

Simmons has been on the front lines for decades of keeping young people out of trouble. He was a leader in Sacramento’s version of the Ceasefire program—which gave gang leaders a second chance with job training and other help—and was active in its successor, Cops and Clergy.

He has also been deeply involved in the debate over police shootings. In 2015, he was handpicked by then-Mayor

Kevin Johnson as the first chairman of the Sacramento Community Police Commission. In October 2016, Simmons resigned in protest after officers killed Joseph Mann because the commission didn’t have the power to investigate such cases.

There’s no one solution to gun violence and youth gangs. More job opportunities and safe places will help. That this center is a true public-private partnership led by someone deeply rooted in his community makes it even better. □

California Skate University opened in January

1976, when roller skating was all the rage. Located at Mack Road and Stockton Boulevard in South Sacramento, it was advertised as the area’s “new ultra modern skate center,” offering special sessions for “Adults, Families, Tiny Tots and Housewives.”

Its heyday was decades ago, but now the roller rink is about to be restored to some of its past splendor—for a new generation and a new purpose.

Nearby South Sacramento Christian Center bought it in October 2015 and fixed it up enough to put on programs on child health and parenting, plus youth basketball and family skate nights.

Les Simmons, the church’s senior pastor and a prominent community leader, had much bigger ambitions, however.

The center closed last October for a more extensive renovation that will end up costing about \$1 million and is scheduled to be complete in May. A big funding piece came in place on February 5, when the City Council allocated \$350,000 at Mayor Darrell Steinberg’s request.

From the private side, the Sacramento Kings donated a basketball floor that was used last season. SMUD is making the center energy efficient with LED lighting. Sierra Health Foundation, the South Sacramento HEAL zone and Jesus Culture Sacramento are also major supporters, Simmons says.

He is still seeking donations to help cover the estimated \$200,000 a year in operating

**Les
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