

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

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## FULL CONTACT



Sun-News photos by Robin Zielinski

Lisa Landreth, left, and Ami Montoya, right, sandwich Whitney Venable during practice on Sunday at the Southern New Mexico Fairgrounds.

## Roller derby league gains traction

By Ashley Meeks

Sun-News reporter

LAS CRUCES — A few minutes into Wednesday's scrimmage, one of the fishnet-stockinged skaters was dripping blood. Nurse Jasmine Kilpatrick spritzed the half-torn fingernail with anti-septic spray and got to work with her kit.

"You're going to fall down," she explained.

That's a given for roller derby. But when you fall down? It'll be fun anyway.

"The whole time I've lived here, since I moved seven-and-a-half years ago, I said, 'If they'd only start a roller derby league, I could stay here,'" Kilpatrick said. "Roller derby used to be just an exhibi-

### Let's roll

- ▶ **What:** Crossroads City Derby Promo Night
- ▶ **Where:** El Patio Cantina, 2171 Calle De Parian in Mesilla
- ▶ **When:** April 30
- ▶ **Features:** Bands, derby information, pillow-fighting and shenanigans
- ▶ **Info:** [www.crossroadscityderbydolls.com](http://www.crossroadscityderbydolls.com)

tion but there was a resurgence, mostly through a group of women in Austin. And then it got serious."

The idea got traction six months ago thanks to former Austinite Charlene "Puncher Villa" Bencomo-Ortiz, best friend Joslene "The Venemous DeMilo" Morgan and co-worker Becky "Hippie Chick" Hamling.

"One day, Hippie Chick asked, 'You know about roller derby?'" said Morgan, 32, a sign-language interpreter and former boxer. "Puncher Villa said, 'Flat-track or banked-track? We can totally do this.'"

With a thorough flier campaign at Milagro Coffee and High Desert Brewery, a league was born — just the second in

### ONLINEEXTRA

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▶ To see more photos of Las Cruces' own roller derby league, visit [www.lcsun-news.com](http://www.lcsun-news.com) and click on our Media Center.

the state, after Albuquerque's Duke City Derby team, and the second in the border area, after El Paso's Sun City Roller-girls. The Las Cruces skaters went to the El Paso practice a few times, but it was a schlep. Plus, Morgan admits, "They kicked our butts all over

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# Roller

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the place."

One concussion, one case of hip bursitis and a bunch of bruises later, they've gathered a team's-worth of 21-and-up ladies willing to shell out \$350 or more on gear, plus \$10 a month in dues, and commit to six hours on the rink per week.

The league still has nine months to a year to go before any hopes of a bout. They need referees and sponsors (and they'd love a legal expert and a chiropractor). Members hope to get sanctioned by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association, to recruit larger members (the team currently tends toward smaller, more easily blocked skaters) and find a venue at least 10,000-square-feet big, enough for 1,000 spectators.

And yes, before you ask, they've checked with the owner of long-closed Tommy's Roller Rink and the former rink on U.S. 70, now a carpeted church. They've also checked into renting a cotton gin in Doña Ana or now-closed businesses like Parkview Metal Products, Sportsman's Warehouse and Pat Goff's Appliance & TV. Much as they love the guaranteed schedule and low cost to rent their current building, at the county fairgrounds, it's slightly narrower than a regulation rink and skaters frequently collide with a pair of mattresses as they come around the first bend.

"Someone went flying out the door once," said Jessica "Evil Lucian" O'Leary, a 37-year-old college biology instructor by day. "Right into the parking lot."

For most skaters, making girl friends and being active is the biggest draw.

"I like that it's female empowerment and athletic," Kilpatrick said. "Women in our culture are not encouraged to be part of athletic things ... I'm in better physical shape than I ever have been and it sounds cheesy, but for me, it's having an extracurricular activity. I'm not into book clubs."



Sun-News photo by Robin Zielinski

**Jessica O'Leary, left, and Joslene Morgan take a sharp left turn during roller derby practice at the fairgrounds.**

"It's the camaraderie of the ladies and the physicality and it's just fun," said O'Leary. She'd followed the roller derby phenomenon since 2003 and jumped at Hamling's idea. "I've had minor injuries, knock on wood —" she said, tapping her head, "— I tweaked my shoulder, bruised my hand. I used to mountain bike a lot, and the crashes here aren't as bad as wiping out. Rink rash is not as bad as road rash."

"We used to watch roller derby on the TV every Saturday morning," said 37-year-old Monica "Whore-Ez" Petty. "You don't realize how much endurance it takes. It's a lot harder than it looks, but there's more camaraderie than on TV."

The whole thing's scary — and exciting, Kilpatrick said.

"It's a full-contact sport," she said. "And you get to be aggressive. There are very few opportunities where you get to just knock someone down. That's why I said, a couple practices ago, we have to stop apologizing to each other, because we were knocking each other down and going, 'Oh, I'm so

sorry!"

When Wednesday's practice was over, players stripped their sweat-soggy knee- and elbow-pads and wrist-guards and ditched their helmets and mouth guards — keeping the striped tights and tutus. They adjourned for frosty cans of beer and homemade cupcakes — decorated with skulls and crossbones or frosting drawings of skates.

"Wow, that's an ugly bruise!" Morgan said suddenly, half in admiration of the purple tiger-stripping on Petty, the cupcake honoree, who was preparing to leave for the Navy.

"This is from, let's see, Sunday," Petty said, without a trace of bitterness. "Somebody grabbed me and pulled me down. That's why I have fingerprints."

Petty said she'd miss the derby over the next four months of training.

"After boot camp, if possible," she said, "I'm going to see if they'll send me my skates."

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