

# Calico Cupboard general manager was on a roll at national skating trials

By Bill Reynolds

Work and play are sometimes separated by a mere fine line. Or even a blur.

Calico Cupboard general manager and competitive roller skater Brenda Schmidt knows that as few do.

"I almost need my skates to keep up these days with the return to full capacity and lack of help," she told the Weekly News from work on Monday. "We are short-handed at all of our locations."

Schmidt herself was briefly away from the popular restaurants last week, but it had nothing to do with the post-COVID economy.

Schmidt made what was a quick stop – both literally and figuratively – in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to take part in the USA Roller Sports National Championships.

"I had to return to work on Saturday," she said, "and I've been working every day since."

It's a good thing Schmidt is at ease moving quickly and efficiently.

That was borne out at the national trials, where she earned gold medals in each of her three events – Silver Division II Team Dance, Silver Division II Women's Solo, and Gold Division II Women's Figure Skating.

She competed in the team event with her skating partner, John Lezni, of Bellingham.

"The competition was tough, and I was a bit nervous competing in these nationals," Schmidt said. "I think it was because of being out of practice, of being under pressure to perform due to our competition season in 2020 having been canceled (because of the pandemic)."

Prior to the virus crisis, Schmidt was able to practice three times per week. Since COVID-19, those sessions have been reduced to twice weekly.

Roller skating is as much a way of life for Schmidt as is her fast-paced career, the latter of which she launched after graduation from Washington State University. At that time, Calico Cupboard had one venue only, the downtown La Conner restaurant which late founder Linda Freed operated in the former Dunlap Towing office building.

Schmidt helped Freed open two



MODERN GOLD RUSH – Brenda Schmidt rushed off to Cedar Rapids, Iowa last week. She struck gold, earning three roller skating medals, one as a team with John Lezni. – Photo courtesy of Brenda Schmidt

other Calico Cupboard sites in Skagit Valley, one in 1991 and the other in 1996, and then Seeds on Morris Street here in 2014, which subsequently sold.

By then, Schmidt had long since been sold on the benefits of skating.

"I started out ice skating at age six," she recalled. "I switched to roller (skating) at ages 12-15 and returned at age 32 when my son, Hayden, started lessons at Skagit Skate."

The two traveled and competed at skating events until Hayden's interests in sports changed – he would go on to play football at WSU, earning his degree last year and is now employed as an aerospace engineer with Janicki Industries, while also serving as a La Conner volunteer firefighter.

Brenda Schmidt, meanwhile, pressed on with what has been a successful two-decade tenure in the competition skating world. She was named northwest regional skater of the year in 2019 and received two gold medals and one silver at nationals that year.

Her early transition from ice skating to roller skating was somewhat fortuitous.

"I became interested in roller skating due to my previous ice-skating experience," said Schmidt, "and since the Bellingham ice arena had closed it made sense to switch to roller skating."

My mom preferred it as it wasn't freezing cold in the rink like the ice arena.

"I really liked skating as a kid," she added, "because it incorporated dance and athleticism."

That hasn't changed, as demon-



1. LITERATURE: In which novel did the character Sherlock Holmes first appear?
2. GEOGRAPHY: Where is Area 51 located in the United States?
3. SCIENCE: How long does it take for light from the sun to reach Earth?
4. ENTERTAINERS: Which actor and comedian's original name was Joseph Levitch?
5. GAMES: What is the sum of all numbers on a roulette wheel?
6. AD SLOGANS: What product was advertised with the slogan "Let your fingers do the walking...?"
7. FOOD & DRINK: What grain is used to make sake?
8. U.S. STATES: Which state has used the slogan "Heart of Dixie" on its license plates?
9. MYTHOLOGY: Who was the Greek god of time?
10. GAMES: How many players are on each side in a polo game?

- Answers**
1. "A Study in Scarlet"
  2. Nevada
  3. About 8 minutes, 20 seconds
  4. Jerry Lewis
  5. 666
  6. Yellow Pages
  7. Rice
  8. Alabama
  9. Chronos
  10. Four

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strated by her golden results last week.

"I enjoyed the trip to Cedar Rapids," said Schmidt, "but it was a rushed trip. I was so busy competing that I didn't have much time to explore the city. Normally there is some down time in the schedule, a few hours or even a day in between events to take in some of the attractions in the cities we travel to."

"This year," she said, "I competed three days in a row, and I wanted to get home to help at work as soon as possible."

The front end of her travel schedule was hectic, too.

"I flew Alaska Airlines Monday to Chicago," she said, "and then drove to Cedar Rapids. It was challenging flying and driving all day and then competing the next three days."

But, then again, she wouldn't have it any other way. The travel and camaraderie – beyond the actual competition – are major parts of skating's appeal, said Schmidt.

"My favorite part of roller skating is my skating family," she explained. "I have met such wonderful people from all over the United States. I enjoy my close friends and skating club here at

home who support and encourage me, and I love to travel."

Those travels to skating contests have taken her as far as Italy and Brazil. Still more adventures await.

"It's a family sport," she stressed, "that incorporates all ages and levels."

For Schmidt, as she showed in Iowa, it happens to be at the sport's highest level.

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