



LOUISE DONAHUE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fernando Oropeza, left, hits a shot at goalie Zack Grant at the in-line rink behind the school at the San Luis Rey Mission parish. Tennis courts were converted to the in-line rink, which also has seating for about 230 spectators.

Mission's rink keeps kids in line

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OCEANSIDE — Nestled behind the San Luis Rey Mission complex is an in-line hockey rink and bleachers that volunteers built to keep youngsters in line.

"We got a \$100,000 rink that was pretty well all donated," said Rose Cully, president of the co-ed Tri-City In-Line Hockey League.

The facility, which has seating for about 230 people, will host 16 teams from throughout Southern California during the May 2-4 weekend for the first of what organizers hope will be an annual round-robin competition for the Friar's Cup. (The promotional logo for the tournament is a glaring hockey stick-wielding cleric named "Friar Puck.")

"We know we're competing with the powerboat races on the Oceanside waterfront," said Blue Gomez, league commissioner. "But we have a bunch of dedicated people involved in this sport so we're expecting some good hockey."

Gomez, who played professional hockey as a goalkeeper for more than a dozen years, some with the National Hockey League New York Rangers' organization, established the tri-city league four years ago with teams from Oceanside, Carlsbad and Vista. San Marcos has since been added to the 24-team system.

Games were played in various venues, including the gymnasium at the Oceanside Boys & Girls Club. With a lot of hustling and huckstering, Gomez finally arranged to have the former tennis courts behind the school at the San Luis Rey Mission parish converted into an in-line hockey facility. It opened last fall.

"It's outstanding," said Oceanside resident Jon Smith, whose 12-year-old son Chris plays in the league.

"It's a very good league. It's a great facility. It gives kids a chance to get off the street. We love it. We wish the prices weren't going up each year as they do, but, it's drawing a lot of kids from our Little League. I'm telling kids they can play both sports. We just have to get

it into the high school level ... thank goodness the mission was there."

It's a lot cheaper than ice hockey, said Ken Klauber, whose 6-year-old daughter, Cami, is signed up for the coming season. "She likes to play hockey and soccer and she'll play soccer this fall after the summer hockey season."

Klauber feels the league is "special." "I'm not an insider. I'm just a parent. But they seem to have an ability to make the best use of a parent's skills and abilities to do what's best for the children.

"It's just their whole attitude, sense of fairness and commitment. It's so family oriented," Klauber said.

"This league is open to boys or girls aged 6 to 17," Cully said. There are about 230 players signed up and about 20 are girls," she said.

Gomez, who grew up in New York City, said he organized the league "because I wasn't happy with what was happening to sports in Southern California with parents taking over and fighting in the stands — the Little League mentality.