

# Skating away after 14 years

## Tri-City In-Line Hockey League founder says it's time to leave

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**O**CEANSIDE — Blue Gomez has watched the Tri-City In-Line Hockey League grow from six players playing in an apartment complex parking lot to more than 100 competing in a real rink.

He has watched numerous players grow and develop in a sport not common when he moved here 14 years ago. And he takes some gratification in knowing he played a role in that.

On Sept. 15, however, Gomez will walk away from the league he started in Vista.

"This league has been my heart and soul for the past nine years, and we have seen over 1,300 kids develop hockey, social and academic skills," said Gomez, a 1999 10 News Leadership Award recipient. "I will miss all the wonderful kids, parents and families who spend many hours making it happen."

From the start, Gomez's intention was to teach the kids more than how to play in-line hockey. He wanted to let them have fun, while also making them quality citizens and helping them succeed academically.

"I firmly believed that I could make a difference in these kids' lives," said Gomez, 46. "With the amount of distractions these kids have today, I saw how easy it was for kids to be involved in negativity. I wanted to give them something they could strive for, that wasn't given to them and wasn't immediately gratifying."

He said he's walking away for a number of reasons, including health problems, league financial problems, low enrollment, deteriorating facilities, lack of volunteerism and exhaustion, among others. He also wants to spend more time with his family.

"Many times I've sacrificed my family for other people's families and other people's kids," said the father of four, who also has five grandchildren.

Gomez said he battled with the decision to stop last spring but wasn't sure until after a conversation with his son upon high school graduation. The conversation surrounded his son either continuing in school or finding a job, and the son questioned why, after working with other kids for so many years, Gomez wanted to tell him what to do now.

"That hit me," Gomez said. "I felt like I put so much pressure on this kid. Our relationship was built, not on a father-son relationship, but as a player-coach relationship. My son had a lot of pressure over the years, but he never said a word."

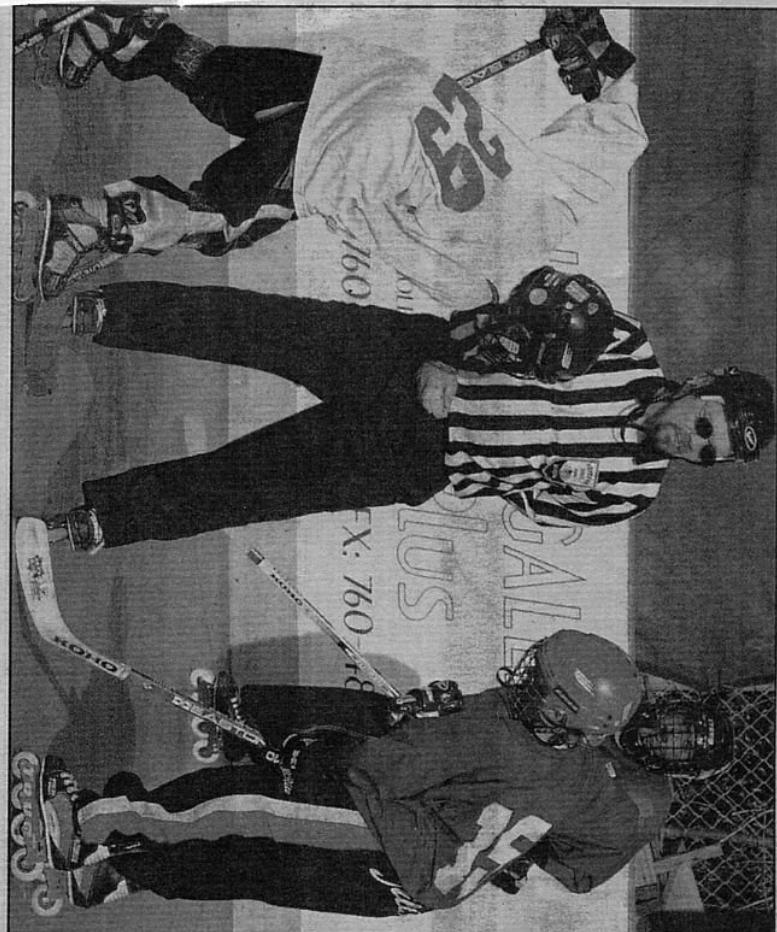
Running the league was never about making money, said Gomez, officially the league's commissioner. In the beginning, he didn't charge players anything but had to add a minimal fee to cover costs of equipment. He took \$36,000 of his own money to help build the current playing rink at Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside, but said more is needed.

Although he is stepping down, the league is not folding. A five-member board of directors handles the league.

"I'm leaving the organization with people who I've been surrounded by and who will take the same philosophy and make sure the kids come first," said Gomez, who will work with the National Youth Sports Coaching Association to certify inline hockey coaches.

Gomez will be replaced as commissioner by Peter Ostner, who has been active with the league for some time. Incoming board president Chris Sathre said Gomez has done a great job and deserves a break.

"I think everyone is sad that he's leaving," Sathre said. "I've known him personally and I know the sacrifices he's made. It's a hard job. There's no doubt that the league would not exist without the amount of time he put into it."



Blue Gomez (center) started the Tri-City In-Line Hockey League in an apartment complex parking lot in Vista. The league now plays at its own rink at Mission San Luis Rey. Gomez says over 1,300 kids have played in the league, which will continue under a five-member board of directors.

Larry Gagnon photo