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## Sparks' giant Scheels sporting goods store

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A brightly lit, 67-foot-tall indoor Ferris wheel spinning under the towering glass ceiling of a huge new sporting goods store is the latest and flashiest addition to the list of things to see and do in the Reno area.

Located in Sparks, Reno's neighbor to the east, the Scheels store is larger than five football fields and packed with enough sporting goods, clothes, games, food, sports simulators, stuffed animals and other attractions to keep the average family busy for hours. Just outside the store is another relatively amazing attraction: a peaceful urban lake and park that in the 1990s was an eight-story-deep gravel pit. Scheels is the anchor for the Legends, a large entertainment-shopping complex rising near the shores of the Sparks Marina Lake. City officials hope the development will make the lake area a tourist destination itself. And with Scheels' opening this month, it's off to a good start.

Billed as the world's largest all-sports store, the 295,000-square-foot Sparks store is the newest and largest location for the Midwest chain. The only other stores in the West are in Montana.

"Unless you've been in a Scheels store before, you can't believe it," says Sparks Mayor Gino Martini. "It's like a mall all in one building."

Radiating out in four directions from the large central atrium that houses the Ferris wheel, the store contains shopping areas dedicated to various sports. Areas focused on fishing, hunting, fitness, cycling, baseball, football, boxing, basketball, camping, swimming and other activities fill the floors on two stories. According to Store Leader Larry Theis, each Scheels store features merchandise tailored to local activities, such as the large selection of skis and snowboards in the Sparks store. Theis says the store carries more than 2 million items. A large selection of accessories is even available for such non-mainstream sports as darts and billiards.

"We have entry-level to high-end in different sports," Theis says. "If you want to buy an adult bicycle for \$79, we have that. Or you can spend \$9,000. And a similar (price) range is true in guns, golf and other sports."

In addition to shopping, the store offers an electronic shooting gallery and several sports simulators. Visitors can practice their golf swing, for example, or drive hydraulic-actuated NASCAR racers around a simulated track. On the store's second floor is Wildlife Mountain, a 35-foot-tall artificial habitat populated by dozens of North American stuffed animals, including wolves, deer,

coyotes, bears, elk, antelope, Dall sheep and foxes.

On a recent weekend, the store was packed with shoppers who paused as they walked under two arch-shaped, 16,000-gallon aquariums affording an underwater view of freshwater game fish and tropical ocean fish. People waited at Gramma Ginna's restaurant to taste Scheels' signature fudge or order from a menu that includes elk and bison sandwiches as well as soups, salads and other entrees. As the Scheels' Ferris wheel, a restored 1930s vintage ride, was being installed, store officials learned that engineer-inventor George W.G. Ferris Jr. was raised in nearby Carson City. As a result, Scheels created a Ferris wheel museum-like display where visitors can read about Ferris' life and compare the size of various wheels around the world.

Plans for the entire Legends complex, created by RED Development of Kansas City, call for about 1 million square feet of retail space showcasing a variety of national brands plus several restaurants, including T-Rex, a prehistoric-themed restaurant with full-size animatronic dinosaurs and interactive activities for children. A Legends Bay Casino Resort is also envisioned.

"The (retail) project is a little bit behind (schedule) because of the economy," Martini says, "but we expect 20 to 30 more stores to open in the spring of next year."

The lake next to the complex earned the city of Sparks several national awards for the engineering and development that turned a gravel pit into a lake park, Martini says. Dedicated in 2000, the park's 77-acre lake offers boating, fishing, swimming and scuba diving. The park has picnic areas, a fishing pier, a dog park, a playground, restrooms, nearby restaurants and a 2-mile, paved walking path circling the lake.

With Scheels so close to the lake, it's a short walk to try out a new kayak, fishing pole or swimsuit.

**Scheels:** 1200 Scheels Drive. Exit Interstate 80 east at Sparks Boulevard, Sparks. Open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. Ferris wheel ride \$1. NASCAR simulator \$9. (775) 331-2700, [www.scheelssports.com](http://www.scheelssports.com).

**Sparks Marina Park:** Howard Drive at East Lincoln Way, Sparks. (775) 353-2376, [www.cityofsparks.us](http://www.cityofsparks.us).

Mark S. Bacon is a freelance writer. E-mail him at [pinkletters@sfchronicle.com](mailto:pinkletters@sfchronicle.com).

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