

SKATEBOARDERS ORGANIZE NEW ASSOCIATION FORMS

By Ryan Poulos

Skaters often get a bad rap as being rule-breaking slackers.

Paul Zimmerman, local skater and former KTSM Channel 9 sports anchor, would be the first to tell you that most skateboard athletes are simply misunderstood.

Zimmerman helped form the El Paso Skatepark Association - a group dedicated to maintaining local skate parks, soliciting funding for new ones and creating community awareness about the world of skating.

"It's a labor of love," Zimmerman, 41, said while on his way to the Carolina Skate Park. "Skateboarding is mainstream now. It has traditionally been a disorganized sport, unlike say Little League baseball. We're just trying to step up to provide a working interface between city leaders that provide recreation facilities and skate park experts."

Zimmerman will head the association along with friends Bill "Dr. Skateboard" Robertson, a UTEP education professor and sponsored-pro skater, and Gabe Lawler, a professional ramp builder and street skater. The trio organized in May 2007 and is waiting for IRS approval on their 501(c)3 non-profit status.

"Right now skate park maintenance is at



Watch out for that digitally placed logo! Bill Robertson, a.k.a. "Dr. Skateboard," doing a hand plant at Carolina Skate Park.

the top of our action plan because it really needs to be addressed now," he said.

The City of El Paso has eight skate parks, the biggest and most popular of which is the 23,000-square-foot, concrete Carolina Skate Park in the Lower Valley.

"I skate at Carolina a couple times a week," Zimmerman said. "It's really a fantastic facility that the city was able to build for us. You know it's one of the city's most used recreation facilities when you can show up on a Saturday when it's 100 degrees in the middle of the afternoon, and there are still 15 kids in the skate park, yet nobody's on the nearby basketball court!"

"However, the facility is four years old and we're beginning to see some wear and tear like holes and cracks in the surface. We're addressing those safety concerns and have been hired to do the concrete patchwork."

The City funded the \$625,000 Carolina Skate Park in 2003 through a Community Development Block Grant. A major issue for Zimmerman and his skating comrades back then was to make sure that construction and concrete finish work was up to par.

Zimmerman said he didn't want the Carolina Skate Park or any future parks to end up like the Las Cruces Skate Park when it opened in 2001. That park's design and construction have been criticized by some skateboarders for not meeting their needs.

"They had a fantastic advocacy effort and they raised all kinds of money and in-kind donations," Zimmerman said. "The youth

Continued on page 17

Continued from page 15

worked with City Council and received grant money from the state of New Mexico. Kids helped design the park, which was 27,000 square feet and cost about \$250,000. It was a great advocacy effort, which unfortunately fell victim to poor oversight during the design/build phase. Most skaters know the bowls are kinked and virtually unskateable and there are a lot of weird dead ends that destroy the park's flow from obstacle to obstacle."

He said the association wants to help cities get the "best skate park at the right price" and monitor future construction projects like the upcoming \$900,000 urban street skating plaza in Sunland Park, which was funded by state grant money and has been in the works for five years.

"Skaters are so hungry for places to skate that they will ride anything you give them," Zimmerman said. What we want to do is make sure the city gets the most bang for their buck. Thanks to a cool website www.skatersforpublicskateparks.org, we've been able to share information and resources on what's happening nationwide and we're seeing some great skate parks being built that didn't necessarily cost a lot of money. Smaller concrete skate spots can be built DIY-style for just a few thousand dollars. A basic concrete ledge with angle iron can be built for about \$100!"

The association has developed an inventory of all skate parks in the El Paso area with action plans for each. They also hope to fos-

ter community outreach by hosting skate park clean-up days and contests.

"It's awesome to see the resurgence of skate parks," said Zimmerman, who rolled at El Paso's first concrete skate parks, Earth Surf and Desert Surfing, in the late 1970s. "Now that we're older, wiser and still skating, it's great to be in a position to help give back and help foster the local skate park community."

CITY OF EL PASO SKATEPARKS

Carolina Skatepark

563 N. Carolina, EP, TX 79915

Dick Shinaut Park

11701 Rufus Brijabla, EP, TX 79936

Eastwood Park

3100 Parkwood Street, EP, TX 79925

Boys Club Park

811 S. Florence Street, EP, TX 79901

Tula Irrobali Park

601 S. Park St., EP, TX 79901

Marwood Park

4325 River Bend Dr., EP, TX 79922

Veterans Park

5301 Salem, EP, TX 79924

Ysleta Park

9068 Socorro Rd., EP, TX 79907

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