

West Side: '... not another ramp park'

Customized skatepark set to open Wednesday

By Andrew Kreighbaum and Denise Valdez

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EL PASO — Skateboarders have a new palace.

After nearly four months of construction, the Westside Community Skatepark will open to the public Wednesday.

"The Westside Skate Park is not another ramp park. It is the second custom concrete skate park," said Paul Zimmerman, president of the El Paso Skatepark Association.

He said it will meet a growing need, as El Paso already counts more than 12,000 skaters. The park will allow skaters to stay off the street while developing healthy, active lifestyles, he said.

"The misconception for skate parks contributing to juvenile delinquency and drugs is just a stereotype," Zimmerman said. "Skateboarding, by its very nature, is an anti-drug, so it's safe to say that a skate park full of kids is a skate park full of kids not getting stoned."

The original price tag for the park was \$200,000, but it grew to nearly \$500,000. It was financed with public



Victor Calzada / El Paso Times

Roberto Garcia worked on a wall at the new Westside Community Skatepark Monday.

money through a bond issue approved in 2000.

Joel McKnight, assistant Parks and Recreation Director, said the number of residents and skaters on the West Side have grown in recent years.

"It's just boomed," he said. "We're addressing things as we get the opportunity to, and this was a great opportunity to meet the needs of the community as well as enhance the amenities of things offered at West Side Community Park."

Richie Estrada, 20, said he went to scope out the new 12,600-square-foot skate park last week in anticipation of its opening.

"It's awesome. I saw the terrain and the structure of it. It seems it has a little bit of everything for everyone," said Estrada, a UTEP student who has been skating for six years.

Estrada said this type of park offers skaters a safe alternative to the street, which can be dangerous.

"There's something to be said about getting your scars when you skate on the street," he said. "But skate parks are a cool way to chill and perfect your skills. I have been sticking to parks recently."

The grand opening will be at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, at Westside Community Park, 7400 High Ridge. Nanette Smejkal, director of city parks and recreation, will host the event and West Side city Rep. Ann Morgan Lilly will speak before the ribbon cutting. Skaters can enjoy the new facility immediately afterwards.

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