

10 years later, skatepark still has loyal fans

Methodist Home Park's supporters ramp up plans for skateboard fest

MICHELE WAYMAN

mwayman@charlotteobserver.com

Ten years ago, park staff turned an old tennis court at an east Charlotte park into the county's first skatepark.

The goal was to get skaters off public sidewalks, stairways and railings and into a park of their own. Plus, BMX bikers would have a place to ride and jump.

Metal ramps went in, lights went up and the Methodist Home Skatepark opened to hundreds of skaters in July 1996.

A decade later, kids are still skateboarding on city sidewalks. Some favor other local skateparks.

But Charlotte's original skatepark still has a loyal following of bikers and skaters and a few neighbors looking to attract more kids to extreme sports.

Methodist Home Skatepark on Shamrock Drive has lost some skaters to the county's second public skate park, says Methodist Home's new director, Marvin Hicks. Grayson Skatepark opened last year outside the Naomi Drenan Recreation Center on Beal Street, near Wendover and Monroe roads.

But the "old faithfuls" who don't want to deal with the crowds at Grayson still come to Methodist Home, Hicks said.

About 30-40 come by each week, estimates recreation specialist and "right-hand man" Antonio Murphy.

"A lot of kids might not know about the extreme sports," said Hicks.

"For some it's just basketball, baseball."

It's also been a couple of years since the park has had a tournament, Hicks said. That will change next Saturday, when a local couple hosts a skateboarding festival geared toward families.

Bola and Willette Fatoyinbo (call them Bo and Will Fat, says Willette) say they take their children Asata, 5, and Jobe, 1, to the park a few times a week.

After playing on the swings, the kids love to sit on the bleachers and watch the skateboarders.

Bo grew up watching skaters in New York City. They get a reputation as kids who destroy property, he said, when really they're just trying to express themselves.

He got to thinking. It would be cool to have a competition in the park. Will, who runs a consulting firm, started planning.

The goal is to promote the sport, healthy living and physical fitness. Some proceeds will go to the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, an effort of the American Heart Association and Clinton Foundation to fight childhood obesity. The AHA will also have a booth at the event, Will said.

The Fatoyinbo children are too young to skate. But what about their parents?

"Yeah, right. I will never get on a skateboard. And my husband better not either," Will said.

"We just enjoy watching them do what they do."

Skateboarding Festival

It's noon-5 p.m. Aug. 19 on the park grounds. No charge to attend. Skaters pay \$10 to compete. Registration starts at 9:30 a.m., competitions at 12:30 p.m. They are based on skill level. Open to all but geared toward ages 6-18.

Rain date is Aug. 20.

Details: www.csmfestival.com

Methodist Home Recreation Center

3200 Shamrock Drive. 704-568-3363. www.parkandrec.com

- Home to Miss Bonni's Little Ninjas and Vovinam martial arts programs; youth football, cheerleading, basketball and soccer. A recent six-week summer camp focused on a different culture each week. Typical park patrons come from a variety of cultures -- Asian, African, Latino and Caucasian included -- staff say.
- Facilities include game room with ping-pong, air hockey and foosball; craft room with kiln for ceramics. Full basketball court with six goals (not air conditioned.) Meeting room also used for truancy center during school year. Playground, skatepark and soccer field.
- Hours are 9 a.m.-9 p.m. weekdays (closes at 8:30 p.m. in summer. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. 1-5 p.m. Sunday.

Skatepark

- Skaters must sign a liability release; parents must sign also if they are under 18.
- Pads and helmets required.
- Cost for youth is \$2 per day; \$20 for three month pass; or \$40 for yearly pass. Adult passes are \$40/\$80.
- Open 2-8:30 p.m. weekdays; 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Saturdays; 1-4:30 p.m. Sundays. Bikes allowed Tuesdays and Thursdays.