

Wayne
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El Paso area becoming hip place for skateboarders

The definition of fun and excitement can be different for many people. For some it could be a trip to the park, going to the movies or for others just a friendly jog or walk around the neighborhood with family and friends.

But if you are Paul Zimmerman, fun and excitement is taking on risks that a youthful 42-year-old can understand.

An avid skateboarder since before it was as cool as today, Zimmerman — and some friends — started the El Paso Skateboard Association. The Association was formed by Zimmerman, Bill Robertson — often called Dr. Skateboard — an education professor at UTEP, along with Gabe Lawler. The group has a simple mission statement: promoting the development and stewardship of safe, freely accessible public skate parks.

Z-Man, as Zimmerman is often called, worked almost 16 years in the local media as a sportscaster/feature reporter for KTSM-TV along with a two-year stint in Phoenix.

Zimmerman, an Eastwood High School graduate, started skateboarding in 1976 in front of his house. He was inspired by his next-door neighbor, Ricky Baca, who skateboarded on a plastic banana board. "When I lived on Wedgewood, there was a banked driveway that was our first initiation to the sport," Zimmerman said. "Shortly after that, Desert Surfing opened in 1978 right in front of his house. That and Earth Surf (both of which closed) were two of El Paso's first concrete skateboard parks," he said.

Both places were pay-as-you-go, unlike the nine skateboard parks in the city today that are free of charge.

"Carolina Skate Park opened in 2003 for about \$625,000 from a Community Development Block Grant along with the enthusiasm and support of then city councilmen Luis Sariñana along with Richard Alvarado, a youth coordinator for Santa Lucia Church, and Ladislao Vicencio, the center director," Zimmerman said. After

director," Zimmerman said. After the closing of the two private skate parks, Zimmerman and his buddies went looking anywhere they could find swimming pools, drainage areas or any ramped area to ride their boards.

Today, innovation has taken over for some skateboard enthusiasts. Jaime Favela, Z-Man's good friend, transformed his backyard pool into a private paradise, often called a *huevo*, with his own ramped skateboard park.

National figures show that one in seven children has done skateboarding. In El Paso, the numbers at Carolina Skate Park on any given night are upwards of 50-100 children.

Zimmerman said, "The average age of a skateboarder is 14 years old and legendary skateboard wizard Tony Hawk, who has video games with his namesake, has taken the interest and popularity to another level.

Eddie Vargas of Love Thy Neighbor will be promoting a Halloween Skate Festival at Carolina Skate Park, 563 N. Carolina, from noon to 6 p.m. this Saturday with warm-ups and registration beginning at 11 a.m. The event is \$5 per person and is geared toward youths who are 17 and under with a best trick, high ollie, and a street contest with age divisions.

Sponsors for the event are Matrix Clothing, Chocolate Skateboards, Girl Skateboards, Royal Trucks, Ogio Backpacks, Dragon Sunglasses, Lakai Limited Footwear and DVS Shoe Co. Also featured will be a Halloween costume contest, pumpkin painting, give-a-ways and many other Halloween-themed activities. The proceeds from the event will go to the city of El Paso Parks and Recreation Department for skatepark maintenance and future development.

The Skateboard Association has a Web site at www.elpasoskatepark.org that will feature skateboarding news, upcoming events, information on upcoming skate park activities, along with photo galleries and a skate park directory. Zimmerman also produced a 30-minute documentary on the construction of the Carolina Skate Park that will be on the Web site in the future.

For more information on any future skateboarding ideas or Saturday's event, call 594-8934 or e-mail elpasoskatepark@yahoo.com

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