

MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT

New skate park rolls into Northeast El Paso

By David Burge
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Life will soon get a little more exciting for youth in Northeast El Paso.

The city of El Paso Parks and Recreation Department is building its third major concrete, below-ground-level skate park at Mountain View Park next to the Rae Gilmore Recreation Center, 8501 Diana.

The skate park will cost a little more than a \$1 million, including construction, materials and equipment, design, lighting, project management and inspections and testing, said Cruz Garcia, a project coordinator with the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Construction began in mid-February and is tentatively scheduled to be finished in late June, Garcia said.

The skate park is being paid for with federal Community Development Block Grant funding with no city matching funds, he said.

"It's going to bring a lot of families to the park," said Carlos Rodriguez, recreation specialist at the Rae Gilmore Recreation Center. "It will keep kids away from (skating in) the (stormwater) ditch down the middle of Diana. It was dangerous with kids skating in the ditch or crossing the street."

Grindline of Seattle is the prime contractor and is now doing grading and other dirt work at the site. The skate park was designed by Site Design Group of Carlsbad, Calif.

The 15,000-square-foot skate park will have a main bowl that will range from 5 to 10 feet deep and will have what's called pool coping, a concrete edge along the top that looks like what you would see in an old-style backyard swimming pool. Kids can use that lip to slide and grind their boards on, said James Klinedinst,

project manager for Grindline.

It will also have what's called a flow bowl that varies from 4 to 8 feet deep. It will have two major features around its deck — a pyramid and a bank wall that is similar to one at the well-known Burnside Skate Park in Portland, Ore., Klinedinst said.

A street course will go around the flow bowl, and this will include a variety of features and obstacles like ledges, rails and quarter pipes.

The skate park will be concrete but will have a surrounding grass area.

It will also have viewing areas and three shaded picnic tables, Garcia said.

"There's something for everyone. From the very beginner all the way to the best skater in the world, they can have a good time here," Klinedinst said.

The city of El Paso has two other concrete, below-ground skate parks. They are at 563 N. Carolina next to the Carolina Recreation Center in the Lower Valley and 7400 High Ridge at the Don Haskins Recreation Center on the West Side.

A fourth is in the planning stages and could be built at the Northeast Regional Park at U.S. 54 and McCombs.

The city has eight other above-ground modular or pre-fabricated skate parks, Garcia said.

Greg Walter, the community center supervisor at the Carolina Recreation Center, said the neighborhood around his skate park has seen some positive benefits.

Skaters have helped to decrease gang activity at the surrounding Carolina Park and even help to "self-police" the skate park from things like vandalism and graffiti, Walter said.

The new skate park in the Northeast "will change the community in a positive way," Walter said. "It gives another



PHOTOS BY RUBEN R. RAMIREZ / EL PASO TIMES

A skate park is being constructed in Northeast El Paso at the Rae Gilmore Recreation Center.

thing to do for teenagers, youth and even young adults. It gives them an avenue to express themselves, have fun, keep themselves out of trouble. It's a cool place to hang out."

Kids ages 8 to 18 years old are typically the ones who use skate parks, but there is no age limit, Walter said.

"That age group is constantly hearing, 'You can't go here, you can't go here, you can't go there,'" Walter said. "This is a place for them."

The Northeast skate park will also attract skaters from all over El Paso, Walter said.

"I see people from the far East Side, the Northeast, from out of town, from Juárez," he said.

Having additional skate parks in the city is a big attraction to skate companies and professional skaters to come and perform in El Paso, Walter said.

"It will make it one of their



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stops when they are on tour," Walter said. "They already do that, but it will be even more incentive to do that."

Recently, the renowned World Industries skate team made a stop at the Carolina skate park during its spring break tour. They said that El Paso had the largest and most enthusiastic crowd of any place they stopped, Walter said.

Gilda "Gail" Wilson, president of the Mountain View Neighborhood Association, said the skate park will have a "big positive" impact on the Northeast community.

Wilson's neighborhood association helped push to have the skate park created and enlisted local skaters to go out



Above is an artist's rendering of the skate park being constructed in Northeast El Paso next to the Rae Gilmore Recreation Center.

and collect 1,500 signatures favoring the project, she said.

Getting skaters involved in the process has also helped to build their self-esteem, Wilson said.

"This became their project with the community backing it up," she said.

Ed Chavez, a member of the Mountain View Neighborhood Association, said that the Northeast has "needed something like this for the kids."

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