

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Let's build world class skate park in Eugene

By DOUG HARCLEROAD

Thirty years ago, when young people said, "Let's go skating" or, "I'm a skater," people would correctly assume they meant ice skating or roller skating. Not any more.

Today, "skating" has a completely different meaning for millions of young Americans: It means riding on a skateboard — a four-wheeled board, 18 inches to several feet long, curved upward at both ends.

I'm a parent of a now 26-year-old son. In the past, I shopped with my boy for just the right board so he could improve his riding skills and have a great time with his friends.

Skate parks — places to ride the boards safely with jumps, ramps, etc. — had not really entered the picture as my son moved on from high school to college. Now, skate parks are the wave of the future.

Skateboarding has become one of the most popular recreational activities in our country. Almost as many kids, teens and adults ride skateboards as play baseball.

Skateboarding also has become more legitimate as a sport over the years, shedding older associations of negative social activity. To the contrary, many skaters now refer to those who skateboard as their "skate family" — a group of people who skate regularly, encourage each other and have mutual respect and caring for each other.

Skate parks are becoming more common across the country. We already have several well-used, small-to medium-size ones in the Eugene-Springfield area.

What we don't have is a large, covered and perfectly designed world class skate park for our youth and adults. What we need is the Autzen Stadium, the Hayward Field and the Hult Center of skate parks.

But it's much more than just a fancy skate park. It's a place to develop physical skills, a place to make or meet friends, a place to teach or be taught how to do a particular maneuver, a place to cheer each other on as new tricks are mastered. And it's a place to belong. The city of Eugene Parks and Open Space Department has joined with Skaters for Eugene Skateparks and Eugene Downtown Rotary to create this world class skate park.

Momentum is building, with the early endorsement of the park by the Eugene Chamber of Commerce, the Oregon Trail Council of the Boy Scouts of America and Travel Lane County. A top-flight, experienced design team

named Dreamland has been retained and has started work.

The city and Skaters for Eugene Skateparks have been working for several years to bring this park to fruition in the existing playground location under the Interstate 105 Bridge in Washington-Jefferson Park. The site is ideal for many reasons, but the primary ones are that it's covered and well lighted — which would provide for year-round skateboarding in a rainy winter climate.

The scope of the project is ambitious: construction of 18,000 square feet of concrete and steel to provide a destination-level skate park in our community. Destination skate parks differ from the skate parks we already have in Eugene both in scale and in the diversity of "rideable" surfaces and challenges — and as a result, in popularity.

Concerns properly have been raised about the safety of a skate park under the Washington-Jefferson Street Bridge. The skate park itself should help to change the culture in the area. Typically, renovations to existing run-down park sites have had the effect of bringing more people to a park and thereby reducing the amount of nefarious and undesirable activities.

However, a new skate park alone cannot solve the public safety problem. There must be a significant commitment by the city of Eugene, its non-profit partners, social service agencies and the police department to develop and implement a public safety plan for the park and the surrounding neighborhood.

Criminal activity must be significantly reduced in the area before construction begins. Thus, there is some urgency in creating and implementing the public safety plan.

The Eugene Downtown Rotary Club and Skaters for Eugene Skateparks are in the process of raising up to \$300,000 to make this vision come to fruition. I invite everyone to find out more about the project and participate in its development by attending the next public meeting at 6 p.m. today in the Bascom Tykeson Room of the Eugene Public Library, 100 W. 10th Ave.

For additional information, please visit www.skateeugene.org. Find out why this project is popular, compelling and should be supported by our community at large.

Retired Lane County District Attorney Doug Harcleroad is past president of the Eugene Rotary Club.