

Extreme Park: 'It's dynamite!' **Project debut draws 4,000** **Skate enthusiasts and pros christen concrete carnival**

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More than 4,000 people, many toting skates and skateboards, turned out yesterday for the long-awaited debut of the Louisville Extreme Park, eager to challenge the concrete behemoth of bowls, banks and pipes billed as one of the world's best.

Moments after Mayor Dave Armstrong opened the \$2.5 million project, hailing it as "unquestionably, one of the best skate parks in the world," throngs of skateboarders, inline skaters and bikers bounded onto the 40,000 square feet of concrete.

It was a carnival-like atmosphere, with balloons, concession stands and vendors selling extreme-sports paraphernalia.

The extreme sporters greeted the park with extreme enthusiasm, with some of the country's top professionals showing up to demonstrate stunts for the crowd.

Buddy Carr, who lives in San Diego and makes skateboards, called the park "dynamite."

"People will come from all over to try it," he said.

Carr, who has skated in parks from Brazil to South Africa, spent much of the last two days sampling the park's features and came away impressed, especially with the signature feature -- a 24-foot full pipe that is among a handful in the world.

The full pipe is a throwback to old-school skate parks in California, said Nick Dawson, a 29-year-old veteran skateboarder who operates Know Fun toys in Louisville. Don't look for anyone to skate a 360-degree turn around the pipe's ceiling, Dawson said.

"The challenge of it is to go as high as you can, but the idea is not to go all the way around it," said Dawson, who plans to try out the full pipe today. "I don't suspect I'll get any higher than 8 o'clock. It's huge, and I'm a little old to break a leg or an arm."



Professional skateboarder Brian Patch, of Huntington Beach, Calif., and formerly of Bloomington, Ind., performed during the opening of Louisville Extreme Park yesterday. The city hopes to land the ESPN X Games as early as 2004.

PHOTO BY SAM UPSHAW JR.



The park's signature feature, a 24-foot full pipe that is among a handful in the world, got a workout. The challenge is to get as high as possible along the walls.

Former pro skateboarder and Louisvillian Jason Brown, who lives in California and helps design skate parks, ranked the park among the elite.

"It is definitely one of the top two or three parks anywhere, in my book," Brown said. "A lot of people on the national level will come here."

A small band of in-line skaters expressed about the only criticism yesterday. Josh Ganz, a spokesman for the group, contended that the park's design should have included more features for in-line skaters, such as round railings and more stairs.



Brigid Sullivan, the Metro Parks director whose department will oversee the park, said several in-line skaters served on an advisory committee that helped with the park's design.

Armstrong and city officials have lofty expectations for their concrete jewel. The mayor's office said the city hopes to land the ESPN X Games -- the Super Bowl of extreme sports -- as early as 2004.

As for next year, the city plans to spend \$1 million to add an indoor skating area, plus a concession stand and restrooms. For now, portable toilets are available.

ESPN officials already have said the new park should make Louisville a frequent stop on its extreme-sports circuit, which also includes the X Trials and the B3 Games. Louisville hosted an X Trials event in 1999 at a temporary facility. The event drew nearly 90,000 people over four days.

Adam Sharp, president of a local sports-promotion business called Progressive Sports Industries, has lined up a major competition called the Progression Sessions July 4-6. He predicted 15,000 people will come to Louisville to watch and participate.

Armstrong hoped that the park also will boost the downtown economy, helping to attract young professionals to the eMain business-technology effort along East Main Street.

People can park on nearby streets, or at Waterfront Park. Spectators may watch from a landscaped hillside just off Interstate 65.

The park is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is free. It is lighted and offers challenges for different skill levels, including a "street course" for beginners.

But users venture onto the concrete at their own risk, and rules are listed prominently at the park. City attorneys say the city is immune under state law from suits that might arise from park users.

For emergencies, a telephone in a red call box mounted on a pole on the Franklin Street side of the park offers a direct connection to police or

Park Rules

- Skate at your own risk.
- Beginner: Use green-circle areas.
- Intermediate: Use blue-squared areas.
- Advanced: Use black-diamond areas.
- Children should have parental supervision.
- Users should wear protective equipment.
- Only skateboards, in-line skates and bikes allowed inside fenced area.
- No smoking, eating or drinking inside fenced area.
- No alcohol or drugs.
- Spectators must remain outside fenced area.

emergency-medical services.

Louisville Fire Chief Greg Frederick said his EMS crews are prepared. They practiced this week accessing the park's deepest bowls and rescuing people, he said.

- Report maintenance problems to CityCall, 5743333.
- For emergencies, call 911 on red phone on pole on Franklin Street side of park.

Lisa Harper brought her three sons ages 6 to 13 to size up the park yesterday. Harper acknowledged safety is an issue.

"There are hazards with any sport, but they must stay within their ability," Harper said. "We will be here quite a bit."

The park "is pretty cool," said Daniel Rothenberg, 13, who in-line skates. "We'll be back here at 6 or 7 in the morning and skate all day."

Staff writer Mike Trautmann contributed to this story.

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