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Ground broken for skate park

By **JUSTINE FREDERIKSEN** The Daily Journal

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Supporters ecstatic as crews begin work on long-anticipated facility

Ukiah resident Mo Mulheren Wattenburger is so excited about the city's skate park being built, she feels like she's having another baby.

"It's like having a fifth child," said Wattenburger, 31, the mother of four daughters and a member of the Ukiah Skate Park Committee. "The community is just so excited we've been working more than 15 years for this."

The first public meeting discussing the need for a skate park was held in 1996 at the Ukiah High School, and many meetings followed regarding where to locate such a facility. Sites such as the volleyball court near Low Gap Park and both Todd Grove and Vinewood Parks were considered, but progress was stalled for many years.

As time wore on, Wattenburger said fundraising for the project became very difficult, as people began to believe it would never materialize.

"People would say, I'm never donating, because it's never going to happen," she recalled.

However, last month, the Ukiah City Council awarded a bid to Geocon Engineering, Inc. to build the skate park for just over \$666,000, and soon after, crews broke ground on the project next to the tennis courts on Low Gap Road across from the high

school.

"The builder is fantastic," Wattenburger said, adding that when she talked to crews working near the entrance to Low Gap Park, they said "people honk and wave when they go by, and everyone is super excited that they're here."

Wattenburger

said she was never a skateboarder growing up and none of her daughters skateboard, but she wants a skate park for the teens that do.

"Having grown up in Ukiah, when you're a teen, there's nothing to do if you don't play football, baseball, or other organized sports," she said, describing skateboarding as an activity that is athletic "you're using muscles, learning balance" and appeals to kids who are independent and not attracted to team sports.

And once the skate park is completed, she said, it will benefit more than just skateboarders, since the teens will hopefully stop using parking lots and other areas to ride.

"They're so tired of getting kicked out of places," she said. "They're not trying to be in anybody's way, they're just trying to have a good time."

The city may also see a boost in tourism, Wattenburger said.

"I have a lot of friends that drive up to Willits to drop their kids off (at the skate park), then they go downtown and have lunch or shop," she said, explaining that Ukiah could be attracting these types of visitors and more once its skate park opens. "I know families that plan their vacations around

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visiting different skate parks."

Assistant City Manager Sage Sangiacomo said most of the work at the site so far has been "digging and evaluating soil, and everything is checking out good so far." He said the contractor has 180 days to complete the project, so the park could be completed by the end of the year.

Sangiacomo said park supporters are still raising money for restrooms, and an auction is planned July 12 at the Grace Hudson Museum.

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