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a home for skaters

Soon Ames will boast its very own skate park, much to the delight of local skateboarders and rollerbladers.

By Matthew T. Seifert
A group of kids are hanging out at T Galaxy Retail on Welch Avenue and Chamberlain Street; a pretty average occurrence except for one thing—they're skateboarding. As it's in the afternoon, the patrons of T Galaxy are having to avoid the skaters as they make their way into the store.

The store manager comes out and tells the skaters to leave. They refuse.

"We're not hurting anything," one of them says, among other more profane statements.

The store manager goes inside and calls the store owner, Barry Nadler, who arrives on the scene only a short while later.

"You guys gotta leave," Nadler yells at the kids. "You're disrupting my business. We can't have this."

"We've got nowhere else to go!" a skater yells back.

Frustrated and annoyed, Nadler leaves, but he lets the skaters know he will be back.

During the drive, though, Nadler had a change of heart.

"I went to pick up my daughter from dance lessons and I decided that getting pissed off at these people was not the right thing to do," Nadler said. "So I went back to them and made a deal with them: They don't skateboard in front of my store while it's open and I will put together the materials, people and funding for a skate park."

Nadler sat on his car talking to the skaters about what it would take to give them some place to go for a few hours. With that conversation, Ames Skaters Unlimited, Inc. (ASU) was formed.

"I asked 'Who's the leader?' and everyone looked at Max," Nadler said. The almost-official president of ASU became Max Highland, a senior at Ames High.

Highland, along with Andy Craig, also a senior at Ames High, and Witter Siasoco, a senior in art and design at Iowa State, work to organize local skateboarders and rollerbladers to help with fundraising and construction efforts.

"I get calls from Barry and then I try to organize the rest of the guys," Siasoco said. "He sends us the plans and I divvy out the work."

Nadler's part is mainly to organize the group and find contractors and carpenters to help in the construction. The design for the skate park started at the roots, with the skaters themselves.

"Witt and I sat around one Sunday—the whole day—and drew up what we wanted the skate park to be," Craig said. "Then we took a plan to an architect at Hunziger [Reality], who my dad works for; and we got a basic blueprint made."

Craig said he and Siasoco then went to Durham and searched for ramp designs on the Internet.

"We took the plans to Randy Lueth, who basically made our design even better," Craig said.

Randy Lueth is an architect Nadler asked to volunteer time for the creation of the skate park.

"I knew the need existed," Lueth said. "I knew it was something I could help organize and get built."

Lueth said he thought of his son when Nadler called him, even though his son is not a skateboarder. Lueth said he felt very sympathetic to the skaters cause because, he said, "They are really no different from my own son; they just like a different sport."

But these good feelings alone will not get the skate park built; that will take money, manpower and time.

"I think we can get the whole thing built for less than $20,000," Nadler said. "But it could be even less."

Lueth said he hopes the park will be completed within this construction season, before winter sets in and the ground freezes.

ASU is working with the Boys & Girls Club of Ames for construction of the park. The park will be a part of the new Boys & Girls Club facility to be built over the next two years, next to the Century III Theaters on South 5th Street. The park will most likely be constructed directly next to the building.

"The biggest factor is to control access," Lueth said. "People have to be able to know the rules and wear protective clothing. We'd like to work with the Boys and Girls Club but we're still talking to them."

"It will also give the kids a place to hang out or get something to eat when they're not skating."

Left: Skaters at Skate South in Des Moines.

Below: An architect's design for the proposed skate park.
“Skateboarding is growing very quickly... It’s going to happen one way or the other.”

Nadler said.

Frank Schill, spokesperson for the Ames Boys & Girls Club, said, “We think it’s a good project but at the moment we don’t have any extra land on the site, there is land directly to the west, but we don’t own it.”

Schill said he thinks the skate park would bring in more kids but he said they expect to have their hands full either way.

“We aren’t contrary to it,” Schill said. “But I don’t know if that’s the best place to have it, we’re still in discussion with ASU.”

Nadler and ASU are hoping the Boys & Girls Club will provide the land for the park for free, but Nadler said they can raise the money if it’s not.

Nadler said the park would cost between $1,000 and $2,000 for the ramp building materials, and $3,000 to $4,000 for the surface asphalt.

“The asphalt should be of almost tennis court quality,” Lueth said. “The ramps will be made of plywood, masonite and treated lumber.”

“Basically, the cost is going to depend on how well we can coordinate the construction of the park with the construction of the rest of the site,” Nadler said. “If we can lay the asphalt for the park at the same time the parking lot is being laid, we can save some money.”

Besides the cost of laying the asphalt and the ramp materials, Nadler hopes the labor and skill to build the park can be provided by the community.

“Hopefully, we will get some experienced carpenters to start the ramps and build the complex parts, then we [the unskilled volunteers] will screw in the bolts and help the carpenters,” Highland said.

Lueth said they are using a skate park that was recently built in Burnsville, Minnesota, as a model for fundraising and how to “get the right pieces on the ground.”

ASU has already started to put fund-raising plans into motion. Highland and Craig met with Tom Zmolek, the owner of People’s Bar and Grill, to set up a benefit concert for the park. They have also begun generating ideas for T-shirts and other items that could be sold to bring in money for the park.

It seems, however, that the skate park will wind up paying for itself.

“Companies that do demos travel from skate park to skate park. For instance, the Davenport skate park has been featured in some skate videos and magazines,” Highland said. “The skate park here can draw skaters from Central Iowa and Western Iowa, so it will definitely bring business to Ames.”

Through the years, there have been a few attempts to build skate parks in Ames, but none of them were able to evolve. Nadler said this was mainly due to a problem with organizational skills.

“It’s all about knowing who to talk to and how to get things done,” Nadler said. “There has also been a liability question, but we have been able to address that problem by setting up a non-profit corporation, which basically frees the corporation from liability.”

Nadler and Lueth said that there will have to be some control of access to prevent abuse of the facilities and to prevent serious problems. Nadler also said a waiver will probably have to be signed by those wanting to skate at the park.

But the real reason for the construction may be the increasing popularity of skateboarding and rollerblading.

“Skateboarding is growing very quickly,” Craig said. “It’s going to happen one way or the other.”

ASU said they have not encountered any resistance to the plan.

“I have talked with city council members, city officials and numerous members of the community and basically everyone has come out in support of the park,” Nadler said. “The reason is because skateboarding has become a problem; skateboarding and pedestrians don’t mix. And we know the kids are not going to stop skateboarding.”

Nadler and Lueth both said they feel skaters get a bad rap.

“They were being blamed for other people’s problems, especially drug use,” Nadler said. “My dealings with these kids have gone very well. They show up on time and they are there when they need to be there.”

But will the skate park decrease the amount of skating that is done in public places and on campus?

“I think it will have an effect, especially for the younger kids,” Siasoco said. “But for people who use the skateboard primarily as a mode of transportation, it will probably not affect them in the same way.”

Siasoco said the park will be great for extended periods of skating.
and will be a meeting place for skaters. He said it will decrease the amount of skating that takes place in parking lots and along business fronts, but people will always skate the streets.

While Nadler, city officials, the Ames Police and other business owners are happy that skateboarders won't need to use their property to skate, the real winners are the skateboarders.

"This is a huge deal," Highland said. "I'm very happy about it, I think it's really cool," Craig said. "It's someplace we can always go and I'm glad I had a part in the whole process."

"If Ames does get a skate park, it will benefit everyone," Highland said. "We won't be scaring pedestrians and we'll have a place to go and skate."

**Right:** When the new skate park is completed, skateboarders will no longer have to face the dangers of on-campus skating.

**Below:** A rendering of the proposed skate park.