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News

Long-awaited skate park opens in Rockwell Park

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BRISTOL — About 100 skateboarders, young and old, filled the city's new skate park Sunday afternoon. The skate park, located in Rockwell Park, is a big step forward for the city.

The project was 10 years in the making, said Ed Swicklas, Bristol's superintendent of recreation. Times have changed, and this is what is current, Swicklas said.

"It looks like it will be well used," he added.

The park offers street features for youth, and a more advanced 9 foot deep bowl for adults or advanced skateboarders. It was designed to accommodate beginner to professional skill levels.

During Sunday's grand opening, many skaters spoke about the park's high quality. A large number of skateboarders even traveled from other New England states to skate on the concrete surface.

"The feeling of skating on concrete is totally different than wood," Jeff Boos, an adult who traveled from upstate New York to use the park, said.

The park planning began with a \$125,000 grant from the state, and now it is a \$500,000 skate park, without the landscaping finished yet, Swicklas said.

"It is an answer to some desires of youth in the city of Bristol," Mayor Art Ward said. The skate park fulfills the city's park revitalization goals by offering recreational opportunities for different groups of people, Ward said.

Eleven-year-old skateboarder Casey Norton, of Terryville, expressed his gratitude for the park.

"I think this is going to be the best one for years," he said. Norton hopes the park will remain free of vandalism and graffiti.

"I hope it lasts. This is all we've got now," he said.

Built by California Skateparks, the park is one of only a handful of cast-in-place parks in the area.

"It's a really good skate park," said Bill Helene, Skaters for Public Skate Parks northeast regional director.

The benefits of the park, besides breathing new life into the city's West End, include providing youth with a safe place to ride their skateboards. According to Helene, in the U.S. 52 children per year die from being struck by a car while riding a

skateboard.

The benefits of skateboarding are numerous, Helene said. Skate boarding is extremely good exercise, and appeals to youth because it is a positive outlet for expressing risk-taking behavior, he said. Youth also learn to encourage each other and interact with the broader community that the skate park provides, according to Helene.

When done right, Helene said, a skate park is not just a teenage hangout, but a gathering place for all kinds of people.

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