

Page 2 E.A. MacKay Enterprises, Wednesday, November 21, 2007

Newly created committee looks to keep VP skate park alive

by Lawrence W. Synett

A Villa Park mother of two is chairing a new committee with hopes of giving those who use Villa Park's 2-4-8 Skate Park a voice in determining its future.

The newly created committee and chair Paulina Jimenez held their first meeting on Saturday, Nov. 10, at the Iowa Community Center, which is located only blocks from the skate park at Jefferson Park.

"The purpose of the committee is to help the skateboarders get organized in order for them to have a voice in the present and future plans of the skate park," said Jimenez, whose son Joel, 7, uses the skate park. "Most of the skateboarders are minors and are not familiar with the bureaucratic process."

The committee is made up of skateboarders ranging from ages 7 to 25, parents, community members, members from the Villa Park Parks and Recreation Department, business owners and artists.

"Everybody with his or her different backgrounds and expertise can contribute," added Jimenez. "The committee is open to anybody who wants to help."

The skate park opened in the fall of 1997, and after drawing big crowds and having no major incidents from 1997 to 2000, the park closed in the early fall of 2001. It reopened in the spring of 2002.

Just over a year ago, Villa Park Village President Joyce Stuegia requested that the park be closed because of repeated complaints from nearby residents.

The residents complained of disturbances and destruction of village property, which included gang activity, car racing, loitering, graffiti and excessive noise.

While Stuegia tried to create a neighborhood watch program in that area with the help of Villa Park police Officer Marc Bregman, the park remained open, and in late July and early August, the parks and recreation department received several complaints.

A neighborhood watch program never was established.

Since that time, village officials and parks and recreation department employees have discussed options of either closing the skate park, relocating it or improving it and

adding security cameras.

Upon hearing about the possibility of the park closing, two groups of skateboarders voiced their support for keeping it open during consecutive village board meetings in October.

Presently, the committee's first challenge is to keep the skate park open.

"The first challenge is the future of the skate park," said Jimenez. "It provides a place for kids who aren't attracted to traditional team sports a place to go and express themselves in an individual and athletic manner."

According to Carrie Karl, superintendent of recreation for the village, the parks and recreation department is 100 percent behind the committee.

"We are very enthused that members of the community have stepped forward and volunteered their time to investigate improvements to the park," said Karl. "The committee will be looking at all facets; whether to change the location, types of equipment, funding sources, etc."

Karl also stated that the village will also make some essential improvements to the existing park before opening next spring and that the existing park will stay open throughout the process of developing a new facility, if that takes place.

The committee is working on organizing special events, tournaments, exhibitions and teaching seminars at the park.

In the near future, stated Jimenez, the committee will work with the parks and recreation department to create a Web site where all meeting information can be posted.

The Web site will include a "Skater of the Month" section with photographs and a brief profile of a skater.

A location to serve as the committee's headquarters is also being discussed, along with a logo and T-shirt.

"There is a sense of identity that the skate park can provide to kids who don't feel like they fit in elsewhere," added Jimenez. "I believe that the committee and the parks and recreation department can find a temporary solution to some of the problems and work toward the construction of a better facility that is more visible and well designed."