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Save our skate park! Skateboarders present plea to Village Board

by Paul DelGuidice
for the Villa Park Independent

Seven young men wearing t-shirts and toting skateboards attended the Village Board of Trustees Formal meeting on Monday, October 15 to show their support for the 2-4-8 Skate Park. The north side skate boarding venue, located at Terrace and Harvard near Jefferson School, has been open for nearly 10 years. Recent complaints of graffiti, vandalism, noise and criminal behavior have plagued the converted tennis court, prompting the Board to consider closing the facility.

"There is no other place to skate(board) in Villa Park," said Dillon Schea, a 16-year-old sophomore at Willowbrook who acted as the spokesman for the seven youths. "There is a church that lets us skate in their parking lot and indoors during the winter, but it isn't as good as the park."

In August, the Parks & Rec Department complained that upkeep on the facility was becoming a burden. Workers found old furniture and liquor cans in the park. Spray painted graffiti covered the ramps and benches. Holes were cut in the fencing so vandals could enter after-hours. The park is open until 10 p.m., but is virtually useless without lights after dark. The lights at the facil-

ity have been broken for several years and have never been repaired.

"Those lights broke from fireworks seven years ago," Schea said. "They were never fixed."

According to Village Manager Bob Niemann, the fixtures were never repaired because residents living near the park objected to the bright lights.

In early August of this year, Village President Joyce Stuegia said she was receiving many complaints from residents and the Skate Park was becoming a problem. The Parks Department was tired of constantly cleaning the area and the cost of upkeep was spiraling.

That led to several skaters banding together to clean-up

★ See **PARK** page 3

MAIN NEWS

THE INDEPENDENT / OCTOBER 24, 2007 - PAGE 3VP

★ PARK

from page 1

and paint the facility. Tiffany Davis, daughter of Trustee John Davis helped organize the effort. Special anti-graffiti paint was purchased and the park was cleaned up. Police stepped up their patrols of the area.

"For a little while, the police were around a lot," said one of the youths. "But they don't patrol over there anymore. They usually just enter the park and search us. It isn't us causing the trouble. Some cops are cool and take time to talk with us, but others don't like us and just want us to go away."

A police spokesperson said in August that the Skate Park was a good idea for actual skateboarders, but the problem was "hangers on and gang members" using the facility after-hours.

"We can't patrol any one area 24 hours a day," said Deputy Chief Mark Johnson. "It is up to residents to call the police when they see a problem."

With the park closing for the season, it is time for a decision on the future of the facility. Most trustees agree that having a skate park is a good idea, but not all agree the current location is the best spot for it.

Over the winter, the Parks Department will be looking at ways to improve the facility as well as options for relocation. Placing a security camera to monitor the park was one idea. The skateboarders indicated that most of the complaints and vandalism is caused by "outsiders."

"The drinking and tagging (graffiti) is caused by gang bangers," said Schea. "We're not in any gangs."

Trustee Davis advised the youths that anyone spotting illegal activity needs to call the police.

"You have cell phones," Davis said. "Dial 9-1-1, let the police

handle it."

After the formal meeting adjourned, Hegland greeted the seven young men and shook their hands. The Trustee told them he understood how dif-

ficult it was to speak out to the Board while being televised, but encouraged them to continue giving input on the issue.

"Thank you for speaking up," Hegland added. "This is your

sport. Your baseball, your soccer. You need to let the board know you care about the skate park. Let us hear your ideas and help work with us to improve the park."



photo by Paul DelGuidice

Save our skate park!

Skateboard enthusiasts (l. to r.) Ryan Hetzel, James Branser, Garry Majewski, Oscar Rodriguez, Jobian Aquino, Brandon Jeffery and Dillon Schey attended the Monday, Oct. 15 Village Trustees meeting to voice their concern over talk the 2-4-8 Skate Park may be closed due to complaints from neighbors.