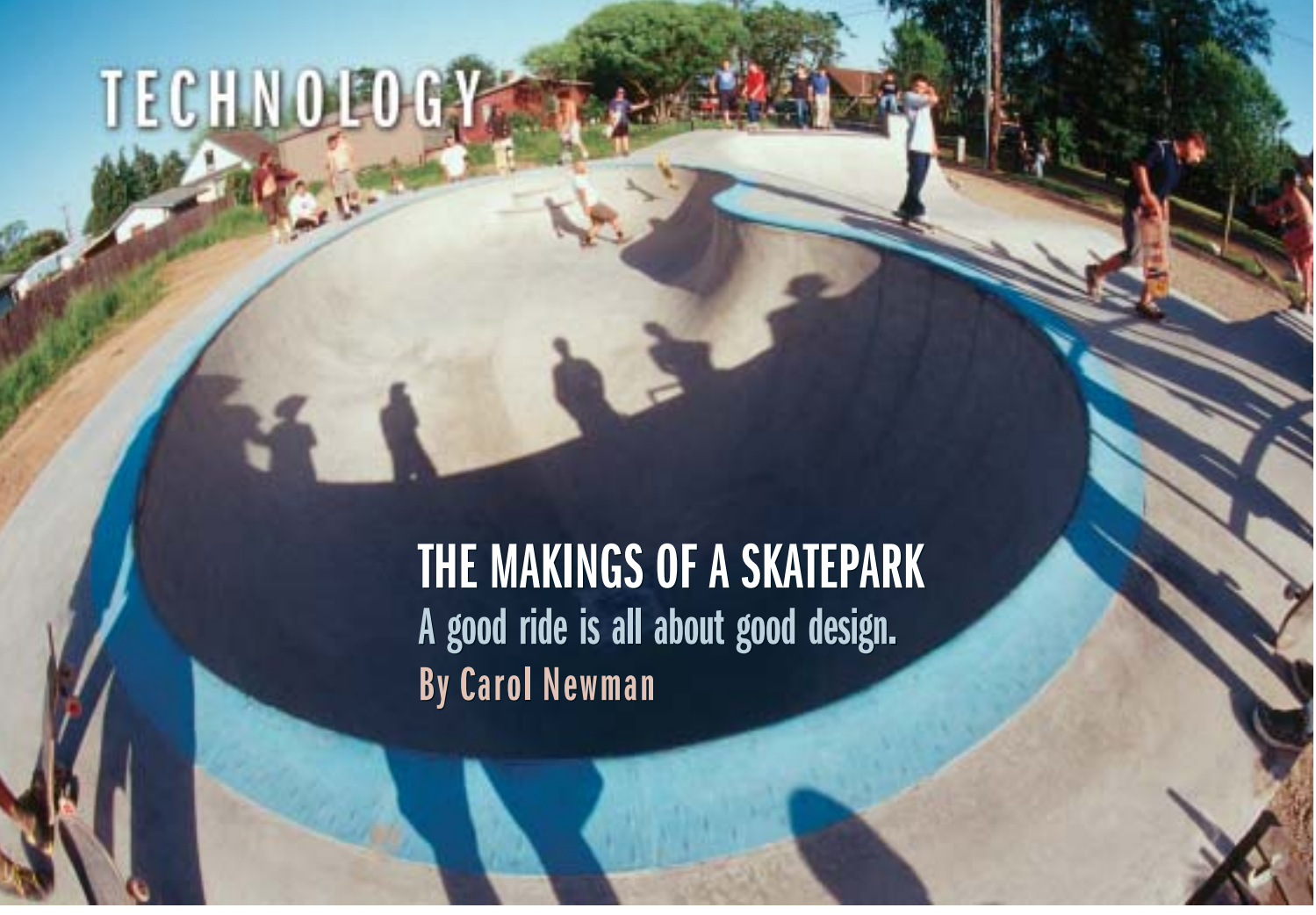
Technology 2

DATE
NAME

- ACRONYMS *(spell out first time, followed by acronym in small caps; exceptions:* ASLA, CAD, EIS, GIS)
- BOXES
- CALLOUTS
- CAPTIONS
- COPY *(Grammar, punctuation, spelling)*
- DECKS
- FOLIO
- HYPHENS *(no end-of-page hyphens; do hyphenated words break where they're supposed to?)*
- JUMP PAGES
- LADDERS *(no more than two consecutive end-of-line hyphens)*
- PHOTO CREDITS/DIRECTIONALS
- TITLES *(TOC same as inside?)*
- WIDOWS



THE MAKINGS OF A SKATEPARK

A good ride is all about good design.

By Carol Newman

GROWTH IN THE SPORT of skateboarding has come in waves: waves of interest among youth, waves of protest over urban street skaters, wooden waves on community facilities, and surging waves of concrete forms on the landscape. The current wave of skateboard passion spreading across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia shows no sign of ebbing. Statistics from a Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association survey indicate that the numbers of skateboarders are growing dramatically-since 1998 participation is up by 81 percent—while interest in team sports is tapering.

As skateboarding moves up in the ranks of sports and recreation, a broad shift in the attitude of communities toward skaters and their parks is evolving. Skateboarding as a legitimate sport is here to stay, but skateparks are still a relative rarity. However, municipal governments everywhere are responding to the demand for skateparks with a wave of their own by building skateparks as fast as possible. When faced with this demand, how should a community decide between prefab modular units and permanent concrete facilities? This choice has practical, economic, and aesthetic ramifications, but most important, it af-

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right hertion goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Cap-

fects the long-term satisfaction of the participants themselves.

One of the tastiest carrots the prefab industry has to entice city officials is cost. For any given square footage, a prefab park is likely to have a lower price tag than concrete. In many cases, the difference in price quotes can be dramatic. According to the Skatepark Association of the U.S.A., a rough cost estimate for a 10,000 square-foot facility can vary from $25,000 for a portable or wood ramp park to $200,000 for an in-ground concrete park, and the cost per square foot can range from $10 to $20 or more. Costs for steel-frame modular parks usually fall somewhere in between, with a 10,000-square-foot park starting at around $30,000.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right hertion goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

Fabulous Prefab

In an imaginary world in which money is no object, every town might have its own world-class concrete skatepark, but the real world forces us to make choices, and modular parks have several important benefits. Prefab units affordably calm the jitters and soothe the worries of community leaders who fear that a skatepark may create more problems than it solves. In areas where skateparks are a rarity, community leaders may worry about potential risks, vandalism, and—maybe most important—failure. What if, after an initial flurry of interest, an expensive park lays fallow?

In addition, young or inexperienced skaters are often more comfortable learning basic skills on modular equipment. For kids making a transition from driveway skateboarding, a modular park can provide a more manageable and less-intimidating environment. Some towns have planned parks with both concrete and modular elements to accommodate different skill levels, and many communities undergo a natural progression from suc-

cessful modular parks to permanent concrete facilities.

P. J. Perry, development coordinator for the suburban Albuquerque community of Rio Rancho, New Mexico, says that when Rio Rancho first raised the possibility of building a skatepark, "there was a lot of resentment for the sport." Starting with a modular park allowed the community to test the waters, "to get an introduction to the skatepark environment without making a huge financial commitment." If the park didn't spark enough interest, it could be converted to a basketball court—a selling point for the naysayers. However, Rio Rancho never had to recycle that concrete: The three prefab parks are by far the most used parks in Rio Rancho. Perry says, "Modular was the catalyst they needed to move on to grander plans." The groundbreaking for a major in-ground concrete park is set for mid-2004.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

For Hailey, Idaho, a prefab park gave local kids a place to skate temporarily while plans for a permanent park were in the works. Community visionaries also recognized that a temporary park would drum up community interest in the project and help to raise precious funds for a concrete park. After building a small, temporary park on borrowed land, the city government and local businesses saw immediately how good it was for the community. There was a nearly universal understanding that giving kids a permanent skatepark was an investment in Hailey's youth that would benefit the whole community. This understanding made the job of fund-raising far easier. Now Hailey's 6,000 residents

have bragging rights to one of the best skateparks in the West.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

Elite Concrete

Skatepark cost analysis can benefit from a broader view. Rod Wojtanik, landscape architect and project manager for Portland Parks and Recreation, has years of experience planning for Portland's skateparks and has determined that poor long-range durability drives up prefab costs.

"In a nutshell," he says, "ramps are cheaper to install but in the long run they are considerably more expensive. Ramps made of steel are noisier, get chipped and rust. Ramps made of wood and masonite need to be checked regularly for screw heads that back out. They don't hold up well under inclement weather and they don't take the abuse of the sport very well. These factors increase maintenance costs and in a few

years the ramps need replacing. There is no cost savings with ramps if you look at five- to ten-year feasibility of construction, maintenance, and replacement costs."

Several companies offer warranties covering manufacturing defects for up to 15 years; however, warranties do not cover the normal wear and tear caused by hundreds of users daily and, therefore, won't solve the durability problem for towns trying to find savings in prefab.

By contrast, a well-built concrete park can last for decades. One vintage park that has weathered the years and still gives skaters a ride is Derby Park near Santa Cruz, California. Built by local surfers over 30 years ago, this venerable park is considered the hallowed ground of early skateboarding in the United States and remains unchanged from its original design. Another, Stockwell Stakepark in the Brixton neighborhood of South London, was built in 1978 and still draws large crowds of skaters. Known to locals as Brixton Beach, its concrete curves have formed a culturally important part of the urban landscape for over 25 years. The park is located at the intersection of two busy roads, and spectators can find skaters maneuvering its enduring curves at all hours.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

Aside from regular maintenance such as mowing, arbor care, trash and debris cleanup, well-built concrete parks have proven to be nearly maintenance free. According to Tom Miller of Skaters for Portland Skateparks, "If you want the cheapest skatepark in the sense that you'll get the longest use out of the design, you have to build with concrete."

While the short-term investment in prefab can be less expensive than concrete, the savings may not be as dramatic when all park costs are considered. Some of the largest costs are the same for both venues: the costs of land, site preparation, amenities, landscaping, and signage. A modular park often requires installation of a concrete pad, and there are shipping and installation costs for the units, all of which narrow the gap between concrete and prefab.

Users as Designers

Trial and error have dictated design and material decisions in the rush to meet the demand for skateparks, often with disappointing results. While there are still no true industry standards, there is a great deal of experience to draw from when choosing between movable modular units and permanent concrete forms.

Often communities seek to build what their skaters want, looking for input from the local skaters to inform their decisions. While that seems to be a logical and thoughtful approach, ironically, it may not best serve the interests of those very same local skaters in the long run, regardless of whether concrete or modular is used.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

A member of the Hawaii Skatepark Association, Eric Davis of Honolulu has seen his community make well-intentioned mistakes over and over. Although enlisting local kids in planning and design development is a sacred cow in the industry, "letting kids steer the direction a design takes is a mistake," says Davis. Kids know they want a skatepark, but they are still

developing and have only limited experience to draw on. "If our world ran like that, we would have basketball hoops that were four feet high, and everyone could slam-dunk."

City planners can't imagine how fast young skaters will master new challenges. "A prefab park gets boring really quickly because the kids outgrow it in a matter of months," Davis says. "When they outgrow it, it's no longer a challenge, and they get frustrated and go back to the street. A town that's trying to solve the problem of having nowhere to skate is actually pushing the kids right back where they don't want them to be."

Davis's work with the Hawaii Skatepark Association, which advocates for quality skateparks, has paid off, and skaters on the island of Oahu will soon have a well-built, in-ground facility that generations of local skaters will enjoy.

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

Design and Safety

In addition to driving up costs, deterioration of modular units creates safety problems: sharp edges, loose screws, and widening lips and joints. In a pitch for a quality concrete park to his city hall in Arlington, Washington, Chris Raezer of Skateboard Alliance, an advocacy group for quality skateparks, referred city officials to two local modular parks, Bothell and

Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes right here. Caption goes

Mount Vernon. Both parks were less than three years old and had already suffered significant wear and tear. His presentation included photographs of loose screws with kneepad plastic wedged underneath. And, he noted, not everyone wears kneepads.

According to experienced skateboarders, the durable, smooth surface and permanent structure of a concrete park is inherently safer than a deteriorating modular unit. The case Raezer made eventually overturned the original plan Arlington had for a modular park in favor of a smaller, but higher-quality, concrete facility built by Grindline, one of the most respected skatepark firms in the country.

To the uninitiated though, concrete, with its deep bowls and electrifying transitions, can appear more intimidating than modular units, and parents and city officials may assume as a result that they are more dangerous. Lifelong skater Eric Davis knows from years of experience that exactly the opposite can be true: "The smaller the challenges in a park the less seriously you take them, and the more apt you are to get hurt." A serious park commands a skater's serious attention and as a result can be a safer park.

Size Matters

Regardless of the long-term benefits of concrete, budget considerations are a reality for all municipal governments, and some decisions must be made with compromises and trade-offs. Size is an important negotiating point (most experts suggest that parks

should be a minimum of 10,000 to 15,000 square feet): Many communities with a skatepark believe their biggest mistake was in not building it larger.

However, minimum size guidelines can be misleading. A community that abandons a concrete design and opts for prefab because the minimum size is unaffordable may be missing an opportunity and may be skirting the issue of finding the best long-term investment.

While size matters, it is far from being the most important consideration that a planner faces. For example, the 2,500-square-foot park built by Dreamland Skateparks in tiny Donald, Oregon, is so elegant that it attracts visitors from around the world and has produced three sponsored professional skaters from a total population of 750.

An alternative may be to consider a long-range master plan that builds a park in phases, assuring the enduring quality of each phase. Volunteers and parent activists in Hood River, Oregon had big dreams and a small budget and, with the help of Dreamland Skateparks, answered their dilemma with a park planned in four phases. When completed, Hood River Skatepark will cost an estimated $401,000. Planning in smaller increments put the project within reach. The four-phase plan (the first two phases have been completed) is for a world-class facility that caters not only to skaters but also serves as a community recreation center for families with a full range of playground facilities and amenities.

Hood River recognized the value of locating a skatepark in a highly visible area and serving a broader segment of the population rather than relegating skateboarders to a back corner out of sight. Well-designed concrete skatepark structures can be sculptural beauties and can enhance cityscapes or park landscapes. The sculptural elements of concrete skateparks can be incorporated into a community's master plan and can create a focal point for recreation areas, city centers, and town squares. Hood River used existing landscape elements in its skatepark plan, weaving the park around important arbor specimens. Such design can take advantage of the spectator appeal of the sport,

drawing nonskaters and skaters and essentially creating outdoor community centers.

Blunders and Bulldozers

Despite the fact that communities across the country are devoting resources as never before to building skateparks, there is still a widespread sense among lifelong skateboarders that the "blind are leading the blind. "Standards have yet to be established for design, materials, and site requirements. While it may be true that well-designed and expertly constructed concrete parks are relatively inexpensive to maintain, a wide range of building errors in materials, construction, and design can result in a concrete mess that has no advantage over a modular park even if initial costs were equal.

For skateboarders in North Portland, Oregon, disappointment came in the form of a poorly designed, improperly constructed, and roughly finished concrete skatepark built by the Oregon Army National Guard under their Innovative Readiness Training Program. Despite the town's good intentions, Skaters for Portland Skateparks now must raise the funds necessary to complete planned renovations to the park.

The experience in Indianapolis was even more dramatic. A 15,000-square-foot park built in November 2000 at a cost of $470,000, Major Taylor Indy Parks Skatepark had to close for major repairs only three years later due to the intense wear and tear caused by BMX bike pegs. Those repairs cost $74,000 and have still not solved the problems caused by the bikes. The damage could have been prevented, according to park officials, if the construction specifications had been planned with BMX use in mind.

For tight municipal budgets, mistakes can be serious and costly. Simply choosing to build with concrete does not guarantee a good outcome. Mistakes made in concrete are very expensive—bulldozers and do-overs don't come cheap.

What it comes down to is that a successful park, one that satisfies users for decades and is worthy of the resources invested in it, becomes a classic by virtue of design excellence. The timeless standard bearer for skateboarders everywhere is Burnside Skatepark, which was built in 1990 by skateboarders/designers/builders in the wasteland beneath the Burnside Bridge in Portland, Oregon. Tony

Hawk star of the skateboard world, has anointed Burnside as his favorite park anywhere and has used it for the backdrop of his immensely popular video games, the Proskater series. What makes Burnside great, according to skaters, is its endless lines (the paths skaters take through its terrain) and endless challenges. Expert skaters come back again and again to test their mettle.

Learning Curves

Proponents of prefab argue that even the best concrete design has a finite shelf life because the park is locked into a permanent configuration bound to become ho-hum to skateboarders eventually. They say that modular units can be endlessly rearranged to produce a variety of skating experiences. This point can be appealing to nervous city hall officials trying to hedge against wasting tight resources.

Many skateboarders insist that prefab just doesn't compare to the experience of skating a good concrete park. Eric Davis compares prefab to Putt-Putt golf—and a well-designed and constructed concrete park to a world-class golf course designed by Jack Nicholas. Davis says, "You can't play golf on a Putt-Putt course."

"Ramp parks do not offer skaters the ability to grow and develop their skills past a certain level of competency," Wojtanik says, "so they quickly lose interest." He and other concrete advocates insist that a superb design produces an infinite range of challenges for novice and professional skaters. Kent Dahlgren of Dreamland Skateparks believes that the very nature of a modular unit limits it. He notes that a skater's experience in traversing a 45-degree ramp, for example, is identical whether the contact is made at point A, or two feet removed from that point. No matter where the ramp is positioned or how many different ways it is approached, the experience, according to Dahlgren, is the same every time. An obstacle designed into a curving concrete structure, on the other hand, creates a different experience with even subtle differences in approach.

Challenges can be built into a concrete structure in a logical progression (what

Dahlgren calls a "concrete curriculum") and can stimulate development of expertise. Conquering each successive challenge prompts a skater to move on to the next one. The objective, according to Dahlgren, is to create a design that produces great skateboarders. Skaters can gain proficiency through a design that entices them to meet a goal, and then another more challenging one.

According to some skateboarders, moving modular units around to improve a park's design defeats any potential skill progression and frustrates younger skaters because it removes an important landmark. There is an important social element to mastering a skateable surface. Dahlgren says, "Skaters talk and strategize about conquering obstacles in a park. Moving the obstacles in a prefab park removes this context and broadens the gap between the high-proficiency skaters and others." The social context of skating is part of what makes a skatepark such an asset to a local community of any size—it connects people across age groups, ethnic groups, and neighborhoods.

To the advocates of this sport, nothing is more frustrating than to see a small town spend good money on a disappointing park. Chris Gilligan of Harrison, Tennessee, a Chattanooga suburb, is a skateboarder who now skates with his own kids. He knows firsthand the disappointment of an inadequate facility and describes his local park as a "textbook case of the pitfalls of modular prefab." According to Gilligan, who is advocating for a concrete park in his town, "A ramp park is a quick, cheap, temporary—but ultimately ineffective—fix. A professionally designed and finished concrete park is a long-term addition to the quality of life for a community and an investment in healthy recreation and fitness for youth and adults alike."

ONCE THE CHOICE OF PARK format is made, there is a need for teamwork between both skatepark experts and landscape professionals. Choosing concrete may be an important first step but, by itself, is no guarantee of success. Whereas other types of municipal parks (tennis courts, basketball courts, and swimming pools, for example) have been designed and built for a hundred years or more, skateparks are a relatively new addition to local landscapes and require an insider's expertise in order to succeed. This is

important not only for design but also for construction. An insider's expertise, says Skaters for Portland's Miller, means far more than simply knowing how to skate. The marriage of great design talent, skateboarding talent, and construction talent is a rare blend.

In-ground designs are more than just lumpy swimming pools. Knowing exactly how a skatepark will be skated—what's possible, what's impossible, what's boring, as well as how multiple users will navigate the terrain and what a natural learning curve for a younger skater would be—cannot be anticipated by the nonskater. Just as important, a good design can be ruined by unenlightened construction but greatly benefits from an insider's knowledge. Surface finishing details, concrete components, coping details, for example, all need the touch of a hands-on builder who knows how his board will feel on the finished product.

Prefab companies should also be carefully evaluated. Simply choosing a company that has done lots of business doesn't guarantee satisfaction. Check references: It is particularly important to talk to towns that have several years of park experience behind them. Look for references whose parks are at least five years old. And then ask questions: Are the local skaters happy? Has park use increased or decreased over time? Do skaters of all ages and abilities use the park? What is the annual budget for maintenance? Has the skating surface been replaced? Have any pieces of equipment been retired from use? Exactly what is covered by the warranty? Have there been problems with vandalism? (Vandalism is often an indicator of community satisfaction.)

Communities should keep in mind that building a skatepark is a major investment. Planning for long-term satisfaction is the key to success. LAM

Carol Newman is...

Resources

- *www.skatepark.org*
- *www.spausa.org*
- *www.50-50.com*
- *www.sleestak.net*
- *www.skateboardalliance.org*

overset

■ (Cutter IT Journal, Vol. 16, No. 10, p. 37, Dahlgren, October, 2003).

Design/Build Skatepark Firms
Dreamland Skateparks
Airspeed Skateparks
Grindline
Team Pain Inc.