



## SEASONED SKATERS STILL SHRED

By SIERRA SHAFER Staff Writer | Photos by RICH SCHMITT Staff Photographer

Palisadian Don Burgess was among the first wave of skateboarders in Pacific Palisades during the 1960s.

When **Tim Keller** wrote *Skateboarding's First Wave: A Palisades Story* for the *Palisadian-Post* last November, he was hoping to provide a first-hand account of how skateboarding exploded out of Pacific Palisades in the 1960s.

A decade before the famed era of Dogtown and the Z-Boys, Keller and a slew of neighborhood kids were rigging up primitive skateboards using metal wheels nailed to two-by-fours. They rode the smooth, concrete edges of parks and playgrounds around the Palisades, unaware at the time they were part of an emergence that would grow to be one of the most influential sports cultures to date. Now they are ready to lay claim.

"It's like our part of the story was lost to history. We don't want to take anyone else's place, but I think we should get to have ours," Keller said. "A half-century after it all started, I'm glad to see the story re-emerging and Pacific Palisades resuming its rightful claim as the birthplace of skateboarding."

Keller's story did the trick, but he admits he had an ulterior motive in writing the article. Knowing his former teammate, Palisadian **Don**

**Burgess**, would come across the piece, Keller playfully called him out for holding on to a 16mm feature film of the Palisades Skateboard Team in action. Burgess' parents, Palisadians **Pat** and **Don Burgess** had been the team's sponsors; building skateboards from scratch, buying team jackets and driving the group to skateboard competitions like the International Skateboard Championships broadcast by ABC's *Wide World of Sports* from Anaheim's La Palma Stadium in 1965. No one had seen the film in 45 years.

"I knew he had it and I kept hoping he'd convert the Palisades Skateboard Team film his dad made to digital and post it to YouTube for the world to see," Keller said.

His plan worked. Burgess, who has gone from a member of the skateboard team to become an Academy Award-nominated cinematographer for *Forrest Gump*, *Cast Away*, *Spider-Man*, *Flight* and *42*, saw the article and was inspired to restore the old film. He sent Keller a DVD of the footage and the former teammates were blown away by what they saw and the fond memories that came surging back.

"We were finding more new footage and we both thought, 'This

stuff is too good to stop here.' We knew there was a story to tell here," Keller said.

The converted film was the catalyst for a skate team reunion and the beginning of a documentary. Keller and Burgess wanted the gang back together – and back on the boards – for one more ride.

Ten remaining members of the innovative skate team gathered to tell their oft-overlooked story at **Palisades High School** last week.

"I wanted to find these people and see how their lives turned out and where they ended up. It's been 45 or 50 years since I've seen most of the team," Burgess said. "It made me nervous, but once we were all together everyone was up for it so we went to Pali and managed to roll the camera and shoot the Palisades Skateboard Team rolling down the halls, all together one more time."

For two days last week, the cameras rolled from the famous Venice Beach skate park to the hills outside Pali High; following the team – now in their 60s – as they rehashed old tricks and swapped stories from their wonder years on the Westside.

Although the project has no specific time line yet, Burgess is looking for a way to make the film

available upon completion. Regardless of whether the film finds a life in the commercial world or remains a treasured – and extremely well-produced – home video, Keller expressed a great appreciation for the chance to tell the team's story.

"I don't think we realized this until now, but what's come out is that not only were we all on the skate team together, but we were all from the same neighborhood just a half mile from the high school," Keller said. "It makes sense we gravitated there. Before, our moms had to drive us to go surfing, but if we wanted to skate we could just jump on our board and ride to Pali. It was a different world, but such an innovative and exciting time. We were just neighborhood kids pushing the limits of this new thing we had discovered."

Among the neighborhood skaters was **Colleen Boyd Turner**, who alongside Hall-of-Famer **Wendy Bearer Bull**, **Donna Harris** and **Suzanne Levin**, was one of the handful of young ladies who skated on the team.

"Knowing we were all going to be together again skating, I knew I had to practice. I've been out in my driveway for weeks practicing, trying to get it back," **Boyd Turner** said. "I am tempted to get back out there. I bought a new board so I shouldn't waste it. I've got to start skating again."



Ten remaining members of Pali High's first skateboarding team reconvened last week to shoot footage of the crew back in action. Front row (l-r): Donna Harris, Wendy Bearer Bull, Suzanne (Rowland) Levin and Colleen Boyd Turner. Back row (l-r): Terry Keller, Todd Burton, Peter Burg, Tim Keller, Ric Burgess and Don Burgess.