

Raton skate park funds finding new youth projects

Tim Keller — For the Comet | Posted: Sunday, March 22, 2015 12:00 am

RATON – In June, 2011, Raton Mayor Neil Segotta signed City of Raton Resolution No. 2011-12 dedicating a site on the north end of Round House Memorial Park for a permanent city skate park. “There is a lack of recreational opportunities for the youth of Raton and surrounding areas,” the resolution stated, and then it formally set aside land for “a public access, community skate park.”

That was the peak of a long effort. From there the effort went downhill, but not in the way that skateboarders like to go downhill. Today organizers have recognized that the effort failed to get anywhere near the needed funding goals while costs have gone up and the number of skateboarders has gone down. The organizers are preparing to transfer the existing funds to two other projects that will serve the youth of Raton and surrounding areas.

Carl Patty got his first skateboard in 1975. Since then, he’s ridden them all over the world, thanks largely to his longtime service in the U.S. military. He and his wife Marcia used to ride together on a long skateboard across Waikiki in Hawaii, and Carl took a skateboard with him when he served in Iraq from 2005-2006.

“I came back different from Iraq,” he says. “I lost some friends over there. Life is short. I wanted to help other people. There were so many kids here in Raton not doing anything.” In 2007, Patty founded Northeast New Mexico Skate Association, or NENMSA Raton.

“Raton was bigger then, and there were more skateboarders,” he says. Years before, another group had raised a few thousand dollars and commissioned a skate park design for Raton. Patty and his group renewed the effort, eventually commissioning a new park design.

“At our peak, we had 62 people at one meeting,” Patty says. Many of those people helped raise funds, with donations coming from dozens of individuals and businesses in amounts ranging from \$20 to several thousand dollars.”



Today, the closest Raton gets to a skateboard organization is the Blacktop Cobra Crew skate club, shown here on Memorial Drive beside the once-designated Raton Skate Park site in Round House Park. From left are Rudy Ortega (back), Tristan Urioste, Adan Garcia, Kyler Urioste, Thomas Esquibel and Rochelle Jackson.

Richard Robilio came on board as a prime mover. “I spent a whole year walking the length of Raton approaching every business, from RBS on the north to the hospital on the south, talking to everyone about a skate park and taking their donations,” he says.

Support and momentum grew to the point that the city commission dedicated a site for the skate park, assuming that NENMSA Raton would raise all of the money to build the park. That never happened.

Ferman Ulibarri, executive director of Service Organization for Youth (SOY), says, “Carl Patty was on one of our youth committees here at SOY. He and his group needed 503-C non-profit status to apply for grants, so we combined forces to lend SOY’s non-profit status to the skate park effort.” SOY established a bank account where it’s held the skate park funds to this day.

“Carl was always the driving force,” Ulibarri says. Eventually, though, the drive lost momentum. “They weren’t successful in getting big grants, then Carl had two major surgeries. Without Carl, nothing happened.”

Robilio adds, “The problem with the skate park was that big donors didn’t like skateboarders—baggy pants, hippie-type people,” he says. “I could be wrong, but I don’t think we would have had the same trouble building a basketball court. Of course, there’s also a lot fewer kids skateboarding than playing basketball.”

Since the city’s 2011 resolution, grant applications failed, construction costs skyrocketed and the number of skateboarders fell.

“The price of construction rose faster than we were raising money, so instead of getting closer we were getting further away,” Robilio says.

“Years ago,” Carl Patty says, “I used to take carloads of kids to the Trinidad skate park. The type of skateboarding that’s popular now is longboarding. The only type of park you need for longboarding is a road. You don’t need a skate park and its features. The kids have been pretty much run out of town so they like to skate down the long hills of Linwood Road and Caviness Road east of town.”

Patty says of NENMSA Raton, “The organization is pretty much defunct.” The closest Raton now has to a skateboard organization is the Blacktop Cobra Crew, a ragtag group of a half-dozen dedicated teenage longboarders. Skating past the designated skate park site last week, they all said they’d love to have a skate park. Marcia Patty allows that “it may be a matter of ‘If you build it, they will come,’” with kids buying the shorter street boards to take advantage of a new skate park.

But the skate park effort is dead, and recently the organizers have decided to transfer the remaining funds to other local youth projects.

SOY’s Ulibarri—who in his younger days used to skateboard down the hills above Raton Middle School—says there’s \$9200 in the skate park account. Any withdrawal or check must be signed by three people—Ulibarri, Robilio, and Terry Baca, who sits with Ulibarri and others on Raton’s Parks & Recreation

Board.

Recently Ulibarri and Robilio have been talking with Parks & Recreation Director Jared Chatterley to develop a plan that will divide the skate park funds in half, going to two projects serving area youth.

“Half the money will be used by Parks & Recreation,” Chatterley says, “to buy camping and outdoor equipment that we’ll provide in the summers for a new program at Sugarite Canyon State Park.

Beginning in the summer of 2016, the Willow Springs Outdoor School will provide weeklong camping experiences and wilderness education to students from Raton and the outlying school districts.

“Raton Parks & Recreation will buy tents, sleeping bags and pads, backpacks and other camping gear, plus hopefully some mountain bikes and kayaks. Each school district will get a weeklong program, sending kids that arrive at Sugarite Sunday afternoon. Monday morning they’ll move into the mountains and stay up there until Friday afternoon, when they’ll return for closing ceremonies and awards.”

Chatterley is working with Sugarite Canyon State Park’s Robert McIvor and Pat Walsh to develop a dynamic program designed to serve students of Raton Public Schools as well as others from Springer, Maxwell, Des Moines, Cimarron, Trinidad and others in the area.

The other half of the skate park funds will be devoted to growing SOY’s existing child abuse prevention and treatment program for youth. Ulibarri says, “We receive state and federal funds for the program, but they require a 20 percent local portion that we’ve always had a hard time raising.” SOY’s Emily Meadows is developing a specialized program to begin this summer that will include a summer camp with a new playground and garden, and activities that include fixing things that are broken and growing things that are new—effective therapies for young victims of abuse.

Carl Patty has a record of every donation made to the skate park fund. Any donor who would prefer to withdraw his or her donation, rather than have it transferred to the new programs, may contact Ulibarri at SOY for a refund of the donation.

Patty agrees with Robilio, Ulibarri, and some of the donors contacted for this article: the time has come to move the skate park funds and put them to good use serving the youth of Raton and surrounding areas.