

For the best in skateboarding, all ramps lead to Newberg

Experts hail the city's concrete temple as the gnarliest in Oregon, and possibly in the world

By **JANET GOETZE**
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NEWBERG — Not in California. Not in Europe. Not even on that fabled spot under the east end of Portland's Burnside Bridge.

The hottest public skate park in America, possibly the world, sits in Newberg, a quiet Yamhill County town known for Quaker roots and the boyhood home of Herbert Hoover.

"It's the best in Oregon," says Sam Beebe, 24, a Portland skater who visited nearly every park in the state for his Web site, Skate-Oregon.com.

"The best in the world," reports Thrasher magazine.com, a leading Web site for the sport. "Eleven out of 10. Ten is just not loud enough."

The 27,330 square feet of undulating concrete is probably the largest skate park in the Northwest, where most measure from 10,000 to 14,000 square feet.

The new mecca at Ewing Young Park on the south edge of the city grew out of a petition to the Chehalis Park and Recreation District more than two years ago from middle-school students. Businesses, service clubs and citizens donated at least \$150,000 in money and materials, and the park district budgeted \$200,000.



BRENT WOJAHN/THE OREGONIAN

Alex Johnson, 16, of Albany takes a jump at the Ewing Young Park in Newberg, rated by Thrasher magazine as the best public skate park in the United States. It draws skaters from throughout the West Coast.

Newberg was an opportunity for imaginations to soar into new design realms, says Stefan Hauser, 27, the foreman for the crew of skaters hired to sculpt the concrete following rave reviews for their work in Newport and Lincoln City parks.

Hauser and several other skaters operate under the name Dreamland, but they hope to reorganize

into a business called Grindline. Most learned the craft as volunteers under legendary skater Mark "Red" Scott. He mixed sacks of concrete in rain puddles in the early 1990s to create the Burnside park after city officials failed to find a site that didn't rouse controversy. Burnside now attracts skaters from around the world, and its topogra-

phy is featured on the Tony Hawk Pro Skater video game.

The Newberg park has a high degree of "flow," permitting effortless skating from one section of the park to another, says Hauser, who grew up in Portland's Laurelhurst neighborhood and street-skated in the Hollywood district.

The park includes bowls, ramps, walls, a "volcano" and something the designers call "Liberty Bell." The volcano is a pyramid of concrete that draws wheels up as far as momentum will take them. At the top of the pyramid is a spinning wheel, painted curb-side yellow, for a touch of whimsy.

With the mound dubbed Liberty Bell, Hauser says, "you can hit it at any angle and ride over it."

The "rainbow rail" of scalloped metal pipe is longer than at any other park because the designers had room to make it that way, Hauser says. Skaters try to keep their balance on the rail while "grinding," or sliding metal wheel brackets along the metal rail.

Thrasher magazine.com describes Newberg as "27,000 square feet of smooth concrete waves. Bowls, hips, banks, curbs. Whatever you want to skate, it's there."

Before the park opened at 6 a.m. July 1, skaters knew about it by word-of-mouth or the Internet, and they were waiting in line, says park superintendent Jim McMaster. One man came from England.

Bart Bennett, who completed Keizer's 21,600-square-foot skate park last year, selected the site and

created the basic design for Newberg. He collected a 1.5-foot stack of research papers on American and European skate parks and met five times over two years with the middle-school students.

To Bennett's basic outline, the Dreamland crew added embellishments with special concrete blown into the park. Their finish is so smooth that wheels glide without drag, unlike most rough-finish concrete, McMaster says. "They looked on it as an art form, really. They even made some of their own tools," he said.

How long will Newberg stay hot? Pete Conley, 26, of Portland, the author of the "SkateEurope" guide,

says designs improve over time.

"The most influential skaters will all say Marseille (France) is in the top five," Conley says. However, the older Marseille park was built about 10 years ago, and he thinks Newberg is better.

"But it's like tattoos," Conley says. "You can have an excellent tattoo, and in a few years you may have another, and someone will come up with a new kind of design. Your old tattoo is still excellent, but new ones come along."



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