

# It's been 20 years in the process but skaters win

BY KIRSTY O'LEARY

Skaters around Nambucca shouted out in celebration on Thursday, when Nambucca Shire Council approved a plan for a skate park to be built at Coronation Park.

The fight for a skate park has been ongoing for almost 20 years, and local youth worker Shayne Teece told council's February 7 meeting it was time to invest in the young people of the community.

"Approving the development application at Coronation Park will help rebuild a good relationship between council, the local youth and the community," he said.

A Coronation Park skate park would fulfil the wishes of local skaters, because it was close to amenities, the town, beaches, and

other sports, he said.

Valla Beach mother Gloria Penny said the move would open up opportunities for local youths, with skateboarding growing as a professional sport and hefty sponsorships available for talented riders.

"Skaters will be here, whether there's a skate park or not, they're not going away," she said.

Ms Penny's sons, 12 and 14-year-olds, are avid skaters. She told the fortnightly council meeting that her sons were lucky because, at Valla Beach, there was a skate park for the youth and they were not forced to skate on the streets.

"On the streets, it's a danger to residents, skaters and drivers," she said.

Coronation Park was safe and very central.

Most of all, Ms



Local skater Nathan Stapleton celebrates with other Nambucca Valley Skaters on the front lawn of the Nambucca Shire Council chambers on Thursday.

Penny said she would much rather her sons out on skateboards

than on the lounge at home, with an X-box glued to their hands.

Mr Teece said it was positive the sport was being recognised for its ability to take young people out of the house and keep them fit – skateboarding was on track to be included in the Olympic Games.

The council vote, in favour of approving the development application, took some time to sink in to the crowd of skaters in the council chambers.

When it did, a shout of joy went up and the skaters celebrated on the front lawn of the council's Macksville chambers.

Some of those celebrating were not old enough to remember the time when the campaign for a skate park began, but were looking forward to enjoying the planned facilities at the northern end of Coronation Park.

Guardian News 14/2/2008

## Speech 'for' Building Skate Park at Coronation Park

Presented to Nambucca Shire Council

7 February 2008 – 5.30pm

As a mother of two skaters, I was asked to speak in support of the plans for the skate park to be built at Coronation Park.

I was committed to speaking today for a number of reasons. One of them was my disbelief that the reason why the skate park has not yet been built is because a minority who hold power in the community believe that skaters are undesirables. I think that there would be quite a number of parents who would find this label highly offensive. My sons love to skate and they are not undesirables. They attend the Coffs Harbour Christian Community School where there is a high level of discipline and expectation for students to set a good example in the community. I expect the same high standards of them at home.

Personally, I think that having to wait 20 years to have a skate park built should be highly embarrassing to the council, especially if the only excuse is because skaters are undesirables.

My son, Dillon competed in the Valley Skaters competition in the 11 years and under category and came second. It was a major highlight in his life. The competition was extremely well run and I had no hesitation in allowing him to hang out with the skate team who toured the coast from Sydney. I found them to be far from undesirable. They were committed and seriously focussed on their sport and this rubbed off on my sons. My son has dreams of one day being sponsored and being able to skate professionally.

For those boys who are not particularly academically minded there is hope for them to find something they are passionate about with the possibility that they could turn this into a career.

We are already disadvantaged living in a regional community in that the big opportunities are usually held in the major cities. I was very impressed with the efforts of Shayne Teece and Chris Hewgill in organising such a well run skate competition last year at the V-Wall in Nambucca. The event attracted over 500 people, including tourists, local kids and pro-skaters, proving not only to be an excellent day of skating, but much enjoyed by the community.

I was told that this event brought in approximately \$20,000 into the community which is a great support for local business and boost for tourism. It also demonstrated to the community that skaters are athletes. Not to mention how inspiring it was for the local youth, many of whom won quite valuable prizes.

In regards to tourism, the first thing my children look for when on holidays is a local skate park. We were fortunate to have a skate park built at Valla Beach, where we live, which is reassuring for me as a mother that my kids are skating in a safe area rather than on the streets which is not only dangerous for them but for residents, and drivers.

As Councillors, the last thing you want Nambucca Heads to be labelled as is a 'retirement village', catering mainly to the elderly. Most tourists who visit Nambucca Heads are families staying at the popular caravan parks. There are parks that cater for young children but there is very little thought given to teenagers.

If you want to label teenagers as undesirables then think about whether you are enabling them to skate recklessly on the street by providing very little in the way of recreational locations. I would prefer that my boys be outside skating than indoors with their hands stuck to an Xbox control.

There are people such as Shayne and Chris who are committed to organising more skate competitions. These events give youth incentive to work towards a goal. They spend hours practising and perfecting their tricks with the goal of winning at a competition and the possibility of being noticed and possibly sponsored and making a professional career from skating. This area has produced some world class surfers and there is no reason why it can't do the same with the sport of skating.

Coronation Park seems to be the best site for the skate park because parking facilities are available and there is easy access for large crowds during skate competitions. The Coronation Park Trust is in full support of the project believing that skaters should take their place alongside such sport as soccer and rugby league. Coronation Park is a safe place for parents to drop off their kids, centrally located to the town centre, beaches and has toilet facilities.

To conclude, I feel we owe it to our youth to support them. To deny them a skate park after 20 years of excuses, is sending the message that they are not valued in the community, that their needs are not important and that they should not bother fighting for what they believe in, but allow others in authority to dictate their rights as human beings and members of the community. I don't believe this gives our youth a good message about being our future leaders. They should be encouraged to never give up, after all, weren't we all a little undesirable when we were teenagers?

Funds have already been raised to build the park, all that's needed is the council's approval. Give our youth a go. They deserve it.

Jacquelin Gloria Melilli (formerly Penny)