

Tout le reste

Local skaters form team despite lack of area parks

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Timmy Cazares had just thrown his body and his skateboard across a grass clearing probably 4-feet high and 6-feet across, landing cleanly on asphalt after a solid kickflip. He's wearing long sleeves and pants, and a respectable pair of chops adorn his cheeks. The sun is beaming.

"Man, that made me feel like a human and not a zombie," he said, dripping with sweat on a scorching Saturday afternoon at the Cajundome.

This passion for skateboarding led the 21-year-old marketing student from Lafayette to create Ragin' Cajun Skateboarding for UL Lafayette students involved in the pastime. Cazares said he believes it's the first university skateboarding team in the country.

"The original goal is to unite all the skateboarders on campus," said Cazares. "But hopefully, the awareness of this group will help get the city involved with making a skatepark."

Visibility for skateboarding is up on campus in recent years, but there are little to no accommodations for that sector of the UL community. Lafayette currently offers what's known as "the bowl" — a wheels-ready concrete pool at Youth Park near the UL campus — but the university plans to repurpose the 4-year-old plot in the future.

The city has neither a concrete plan nor the funding to construct a new skatepark.



Photo by Lanie Lee Cook/The Vermilion

Jasmin Honegger, a 20-year-old electrical engineering junior, ollies the three-stair at the Cajundome. The Lafayette native has teamed up with fellow UL Lafayette student Timmy Cazares to bring a competitive skateboarding team to campus.

"Right now, our budget has been tight, and we don't have a lot of dollars for new capital improvements," explained Greg Gautreaux, athletic

programs and maintenance manager of Lafayette's Parks and Recreation Department. "So the skatepark's not in the immediate future. Not to say that

it won't ever be. I still would like to see us build one."

Gautreaux said he's working with individuals in the private sector to secure funding that, when paired with grant money, the city could potentially match to build a skatepark. Similar ventures were successful in placing handicap-accessible playground equipment at Girard Park and artificial turf at Clark Field.

"When we have matching funds, it makes it easier for us as a sell (to the Lafayette City-Parish Council)," explained Gautreaux.

The 1,900-square-foot bowl was built in 2009 for \$84,000, said Gautreaux, and he said he anticipates the eventual budget for a new park could be well over \$200,000. But Dave Wattigny, a local skateboarder and skatepark builder, said it could be done more efficiently. He said he's built a 10,000-square-foot facility in Rhode Island for around the same cost as the bowl's construction.

Disparities like this can be common, explained Wattigny, who's built skateparks around the country, including the bowl in Lafayette. For example: A 9,000-square-foot portion of the Hammond skatepark cost \$200,000, he said, while a 12,000-square-foot park he built in Montana went for only \$150,000.

He blames the cost-size disproportion on a city's decision to

give the construction bid to a major contractor that sub-contracts to smaller skatepark building companies rather than contracting those smaller companies directly.

“If they would just let the little guy in to build with all of the budget, the product would be so much better,” said Wattigny. “As a builder, I know what it costs to where our company can still make money and build a good park, and not blow the budget, but still build a good product.”

Current city parks with room to develop a skatepark are Brown, Beaulieu and Chargois parks, said Gautreaux. But Wattigny said he’s looking beyond the city limits.

“From my experience in building skateparks, almost every one I’ve built has been first from a little outskirts of a town, and later on in the city,” he said. “The little towns get them first, and it forces the bigger city to realize, OK, this is gonna take away taxpayer money, because it’s a public facility that draws people.”

Broussard acquired 131 acres in March for a future recreational facility off U.S. Highway 90, and a smaller 50-acre park is planned in the southwest corner of Broussard off



Photo by Lanie Lee Cook/ The Vermilion

Timmy Cazares and Jasmin Honegger chill out after a skate session on the north end of campus off University Avenue.. “I was tired of going to football games,” Cazares said of his inspiration to start up Ragin’ Cajun Skateboarding with Honegger.

Heart D Farm Road. Youngsville also broke ground in January on a 70-acre complex. Neither included a skatepark

in its initial facility layouts.

Skateparks should be an important inclusion with these facilities, Wattigny argued, not only because they’re community-builders, but revenue-builders, as well. They attract patrons to local businesses that might not be in the area otherwise, as skateboarders — oftentimes, with parents — will drive as far as it takes to get to the nearest city with a skatepark.

At this point, the nearest parks beyond the condemned bowl in Lafayette are in Baton Rouge, Morgan City, Hammond and Lake Charles.

Wattigny agreed that the investment would be a lasting one.

“There are more people skateboarding because it’s become more accepted, and it’s an individual thing,” he explained. “Your parents don’t have to drop you off and bring cookies and Kool-Aid. That’s just what society has developed into, plain and simple. Some people can hate it, some people can love it, but the numbers are large. And skating in a driveway can only do so much.”

Cazares said he intends to travel with the Ragin’ Cajun Skateboarding team to the Baton Rouge skatepark and to regional contests across the South. Along with 20-year-old electrical engineering student Jasmin Honegger, who helped establish the group with Cazares, they’re planning a Sept. 29 fundraising game of SKATE — for prize money — in Parc Sans Souci.

“I was tired of going to football games and stuff,” said Cazares of his vision to establish the club. “But eventually, maybe we can get more schools to do the same thing as us.”



Photo by Lanie Lee Cook/The Vermilion

Timmy Cazares feebles to 50-50 on campus. Cazares co-founded the Ragin’ Cajun Skateboarding team.