

U.S.

Peter Lynch's Wife Flips for Skateboarding, and Boston Benefits

Jan. 18 (Bloomberg) -- Carolyn Lynch, wife of Fidelity Investments' former star manager Peter Lynch, became a fan of skateboarding four years ago when she stopped at a playground and asked a group of teenagers to show her how to "ollie."

The encounter turned into a boon for the city of Boston.

Lynch persuaded her husband, the famed stock picker who boosted the value of Boston-based Fidelity's Magellan Fund nearly eightfold from 1977 to 1990, to donate \$100,000 toward the Charles River Skatepark. Planners say it will be the biggest public skateboarding park in the U.S. The site, slated to open by the end of this year, will hold almost an acre (0.4 hectare) of obstacles and ramps and will have lights for 24-hour use.

"Sick" is how Will Burstein, 17, of the Boston suburb of Winchester, describes the plan. That's skateboarding lingo for really good, awesome or super.

"Anyone who thinks these kids are up to no good hasn't talked to them or spent time with them," says Carolyn Lynch, 59. "They're truly athletes."

Lynch's donation comes from the couple's Lynch Foundation. Other donations include \$75,000 from the state of Massachusetts, \$100,000 from the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and \$25,000 from the city of Cambridge, according to Renata von Tscherner, president of the Charles River Conservancy, the group coordinating the project.

Fundraising continues for the \$2.1 million project being built on the Cambridge side of the river, near the Museum of Science.

"Kids today aren't playing baseball or basketball 'cause they're so one-dimensional," says Burstein, a high school junior who has been a skateboarder since he was 6. "With skateboarding you have unlimited possibilities, and you can always keep learning."

Kickflip, Ollie

Those possibilities include the "kickflip," or spinning the board while airborne, and the "ollie," jumping up in a way that keeps the board underfoot while the skateboarder is in the air.

Burstein is one of dozens of teenagers who spend their after-school hours riding skateboards in Boston's

downtown Financial District -- Bank of America's plaza on Congress Street is a favorite spot -- and the Back Bay area, where they spin and flip near the fountain in Copley Square or on the steps of the Boston Public Library.

In Cambridge, the favorite spot is Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Stata Center, which opened in 2004, Burstein says. Skateboarders call the Frank Gehry-designed futuristic structure the "twisted building," because of its distorted shape, and they like to practice sliding along the wide benches and curbs around its exterior, he says.

'A Bust'

"Just about every place that's good for skateboarding is a bust, so we really need a place we can go without getting kicked out," says Burstein. A "bust" is a site with lots of benches, ramps and curbs to entice skateboarders yet one that is guarded by police officers or private security guards who kick them out.

It's illegal to skateboard on public property in Boston, where the fine is \$100. In Cambridge, the fine is \$50. That normally doesn't deter young skateboarders, and enforcement is spotty.

"Skateboarding is the fastest-growing sport in the country, and most cities have no facilities to handle it," says von Tscharnner, 57. "Instead, they outlaw it."

"Here we have a piece of land under a highway, so not viable as a traditional park, and we can give these kids a place to go where they can do what they love without breaking the law," she adds.

The park will be under a ramp of the new Leonard P. Zakim Bunker Hill Bridge, a focal point of Boston's \$14.6 billion "Big Dig" highway project. The ramp will protect skaters from the sun and rain, von Tscharnner says.

Bowls and Pipes

The new park will have bowls, which look like empty swimming pools, and funnel-like "pipes" used for stunts. The idea for the park came from watching her teenage son's frustration as he searched for places to skateboard, the Swiss-born urban planner says.

The park is designed for inline skaters and "BMX" stunt bicycle riding as well.

Like skateboarders, BMX riders play a "cat and mouse" game with the police, using urban features such as concrete barriers or walls to practice stunts until they are chased away, says Jody Stoddard, 35, who has been riding since he was 10.

"I know people look at us and see a group of shifty-looking kids hanging around, but what they don't know is we're practicing the same stunt over and over until we get it right," says Stoddard, owner of Timeless BMX, a store in Cambridge that sells bikes and gear. "It takes a lot of concentration and skill to do what we do."

'Place in the Sun'

Lynch says she hasn't skateboarded since pulling over for her impromptu lesson near her home in Marblehead, Massachusetts. She says she was as impressed with the personalities of the skaters she met as she was with their athletic abilities.

"They were totally nonplussed by my sudden appearance, and very polite and eager to show me what they do," she says. "These are good kids who deserve their place in the sun, even if it is under a highway ramp."

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