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February 23, 2007

Santa Cruz unveils \$1.3 million skate park

By Shanna McCord

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Arturo Ayala is way stoked.

With a serious look on his face, crouched on his skateboard, the 39-year-old longtime skater and local resident rolled side to side, catching air each time he reached the lip of the bowl.

After a few flawless maneuvers in less than a minute, Ayala slipped off his board and ducked out to give the next guy a shot on the city's new state-of-the-art \$1.3 million skate park, which opened Thursday at Mike Fox Park on San Lorenzo Boulevard.

"This is pretty nice," Ayala said of the skate park. "There's plenty of obstacles here for everyone. I like it"

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After a long and bumpy 10-year road that included a lawsuit, design problems and an emergency loan from the city, the Parks and Recreation Department finally unveiled the 15,000-square-foot skate park. It's next to the San Lorenzo River near Ocean Street.

About 300 people showed up to see what the hype — a full pipe, several bowls, steps, ramps and ledges — was all about.

"It's your park," Mayor Emily Reilly told the crowd. "This is the effort of everybody working together"

Rain forced postponement of the inaugural rides. But less than an hour later, after speeches and accolades from city leaders, the sun came out and skaters were invited to give it a test run.

Maintenance crews used [Advertisement](#) brooms and leaf blowers to hurry the drying of the concrete surface.

The skate park, one of the city's highest funding priorities in the past decade, has been a long time coming.

City leaders struggled early on with finding the right location. Later, they were hit with engineering challenges and escalating costs for construction materials, both of which pushed the park's price tag to more than double the original 1996 estimate of \$500,000.

The City Council agreed last year to loan the Parks and Recreation Department \$325,000 from the public trust fund to help close the financial gap. The Parks Department postponed some projects to cover \$200,000.

Fundraising efforts have been under way to pay back the trust fund. Parks Director Dannettee Shoemaker said the city would consider naming the park after a major donor. Mike Fox refers to the area where the park sits, not the skate park.

The skate park was designed by local architect Zach Wormhoudt, who picked up the project where his father Ken Wormhoudt left off when he died in 1997.

Wormhoudt, who designs skate parks all over the world, swells with pride when talking about designing a park for his hometown.

"It turned out to be a really positive project," he said. "It's a way for Santa Cruz to come together"

Early plans had called for building a skate park at a spot near Neary Lagoon at Bay and California streets. The idea was quashed, however, after nearby residents opposed it and a lawsuit filed in 2000 claimed the park was illegal because the city's lagoon-management plan prohibits skating in the park area.

The city also looked at constructing a skate facility in San Lorenzo and Harvey West parks before settling on what was once the home of several old tennis courts in 2005.

"Identifying the site was a real challenge because of the stigma associated with skaters and skate parks," Shoemaker said. "Skaters proved what good neighbors they can be with the Fun Spot"

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Park rules prohibit skating after dark and skaters must wear a helmet.

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