

Construction expected to begin soon on Pittsfield skate park

By DEBORAH GERTZ HUSAR

Herald-Whig Staff Writer

PITTSFIELD, Ill. -- The first signs of a proposed skate park in Pittsfield should be visible by this fall.

The final design for the park spearheaded by the Pike County Skaters, an organization of county youth and adults who support them, won the city's blessing last week, and construction soon should begin at the horseshoe area at King Park.

"Our hope is to have the concrete pad laid by the end of the construction season," said Michele Westmaas, mother of a skater and a contact person for Pike County Skaters. "We will be fundraising in the community and writing for grants with hopes of putting on the first equipment as soon as the weather breaks in the spring."

Equipment for the park -- designed by American Ramp Co. based on a "wish list" from area skaters -- is expected to cost \$125,000.

Organizers hope to raise the full amount by spring. Plans call for taking part in festivals and parades this fall to boost awareness of the park and raise money to build it.

But the design provides the option of developing the park in three phase.

"If we're only able to raise one-third of the money, we're able to put in a portion of the equipment," Westmaas said. "Each piece of equipment we've priced out individually. Organizations or individuals can sponsor a piece of equipment."

Westmaas said the skate park will provide another recreational activity for young people in Pittsfield and beyond.

"That's the biggest thing," she said. "The other thing that's good about it is the kids have been involved in the project from the beginning. They've seen how a few people can impact their community and will have some ownership in that park."

The park also likely will draw visitors to the community, "sort of like when golfers travel to try a new course. We hope to see some new folks around town," Westmaas said. "Even people coming to camp at the lake will have another thing to do while in town."

Finding a place to skate has been a challenge in Pittsfield and other Pike County communities with battles brewing between young people wanting to enjoy a sport and business owners and residents concerned with safety and liability issues.

The discussion spilled over last year into City Council and County Board meetings, prompted a skateboard ban on the courthouse grounds and spurred complaints to law enforcement. Pike County Skaters formed to build a park geared to skaters of all ages and abilities.

The idea already has won support in the Pittsfield community.

Labor and materials for the concrete pad are being provided at cost or donated to the project, and "by giving them the rest of the construction season, we can allow people helping us to do it at their convenience," Westmaas said. "We're pretty excited."

-- dhusar@whig.com/221-3379