

Jamie Notarthomas

Jamie remembers the day in 1978 when “real” skateboarding was introduced to a group of 13-15 year-old Eastwood kids at Huntington Park. Jimi Crimi, who lived in the Arlington section of Eastwood, showed up one day with expensive custom skateboards and a magazine covering the latest gear and stars of this radical new sport coming out of California.



Jamie skateboarding in the old Huntington Park pool (1979)

“Jimi was wearing pads,” Jamie said, “that protected him from falls that would normally put kids in the hospital. We were awed by his gravity-defying tricks. And it didn’t take long for him to jump over the fence and continue his moves in the empty, Olympic-sized Huntington Pool.”

Totally Sold on Skateboarding

From that day forward, Jamie and his friends had a whole new attitude about skateboarding. Every year after the pool was drained, that concrete bowl became their secret skate park with a 12-foot vertical drop and “rock star” murals painted on the pool house walls.

“The seven of us were so hooked,” Jamie said, “that we started spending our paper-route money and allowances on knee pads, helmets, Bowman boards, Powell wheels and bearings.”

Members of this dedicated group included Jimi, Jamie, Bob Heisey, Pete Mondo, Jimmy Puglia, Bob Wyckutt, and Andy Holtsberry. They spent countless hours, day and night, honing their skills under the bright lights coming from the former home of the Eastwood Bears Football field.

The tricks they practiced, the Foot Plant and the Hand Plant, are considered “old school” by today’s standards. For the Foot Plant, skaters kicked their feet off the 12-foot ledge and went up a few feet higher before dropping 15 feet into a smooth, graceful roll. On the Hand Plant, they rode up and used one hand to grab the 12-foot edge; then, while holding the board to their feet, they flipped over before rolling back down into the pool.

New Tricks a Part of Street Skating

During summer when the pool was in use, Eastwood skateboarders would “rip up the streets”- their preferred name for street skating. Because the sport was so new, and the public didn’t quite know what to make of it, there were no rules against skating on public streets and sidewalks.

Once they hit the streets, the guys ramped up their daring moves. “Even though it could be dangerous,” Jamie said, “we’d get incredible speed going down the Hickock Avenue hill. On hills that weren’t as steep, we’d go down in a hand stand with guys stationed to watch for cars.”

Perfecting those tricks took courage and a great deal of determination. With it came increased pride and status for their sport. When word came that a new skate park opened in Utica that would be holding competitions, the idea of forming a team appealed to them. They named their team "The Rip City Rats" and designed a logo that is available for new Eastwood skateboarding teams.

Planting a Seed for the Future

In 1980, there were rumors the Huntington Pool would be permanently closed, which motivated The Rip City Rats to save-and even improve-their cherished skate site. With help from community leaders, including Bob Bezy of Catholic Charities and Leo Sweeney from Eastwood Junior High, Jamie and the Rip City Rats submitted a "save the skate park" proposal to the Eastwood Program in Community Education (EPIC). From there, it went to City Hall but was not approved.

Looking back on that effort, Jamie observed, "We could never have imagined that one day our petition would be reintroduced, and result in a project like The East Woods Skate Plaza that received financial support from the great Tony Hawk. We are delighted and proud to know that our children-and future generations-will enjoy skateboarding at Huntington Park as much as we did."



Jamie and his son Riley both skateboard (2014)