

Neil Kraus

When it comes to persevering with a project, 23-year-old skateboarder Neil Kraus sets the bar pretty high. Since the age of 15, Neil has been a working member of Eastwood Neighborhood Association's (ENA's) Skate Park Research Committee throughout its eight years of planning, designing and building the East Woods Skate Plaza.

Skater involvement key to project success



Neil is one of the first skateboarders to work with the Skate Park Research Committee (2010)

The Committee decided early-on to recruit members of the skateboarding community in the skate park project. Monthly meetings were held where skaters submitted ideas for the design, construction and future operation of the park. They also helped raise funds and worked with Mayor Stephanie Miner's office to secure grants from New York State and the City of Syracuse.

Skaters wanted a venue large enough for many individuals to work on their skills and learn new tricks at the same time. This led to the current design of the East Woods Skate Plaza, which is the first of its kind in Central New York.

Neil's input was invaluable

As a founding member of the Committee, Neil submitted photos, videos and recommendations for the East Woods Skate Plaza based on other skate parks he visited while on family vacations.

"Serving on the Committee was discouraging at times," he said, "because what I thought would take three years ended up taking eight. Time is a very valuable part of life, so I found myself getting impatient when progress wasn't happening as quickly as I thought it should." But, with construction almost completed and a grand opening scheduled for June

2014, Neil is glad he stuck with this project that offered valuable lessons in goal setting, planning, fundraising and project oversight.

First skateboard was homemade

Neil was only eight years old when he picked up his first skateboard. It was a homemade version his mother made in the 1970s, using roller skate wheels since skateboarding had yet to catch on commercially.

By the age of 13, Neil had developed a driving passion for skateboarding which he calls more a "way of life" than a simple sport or hobby. The physical challenges came fairly easy for Neil. "I figured out pretty quickly how to balance while positioned sideways on the board," he said, "and before long I was able to complete my first basic jump, and move on to harder moves and obstacles."

Neil made many lasting friendships as an active member of the Central New York skateboarding community. During his years at Henninger High School, SUNY Albany and Onondaga Community College, Neil continued to volunteer on the Skate Park Research Committee taking a keen interest in every detail.

Skateboard culture and teaching future generations

Respect and watching-to-learn are a big part of skateboarding culture. There are definite rules of the road and ways of doing things. For example, skaters wait their turn and never push ahead of another skater-which they call "snaking." Over time, these traditions have helped maintain order, respect, and fair play.

Neil's commitment to skateboarding has gone far beyond his personal enjoyment. To advance the sport locally, he was part of a group that got permission from the City to transform a rundown tennis court at Ormond Spencer Park into a skate park.

Another part of the Committee's work included encouraging the use of a skateboarding curriculum for Huntington School's physical education classes. If implemented, Neil and other skaters will offer to "coach the teachers" on the spirit, art and physical demands of skateboarding.

Neil's future will include skateboarding

To stay active during Central New York's cold winter months, Neil also took up snowboarding. One day, he plans on moving to Colorado—a snowboarding mecca—and pursuing a degree in chemistry to become a researcher. But his commitment to skateboarding will continue.

"The sport has really evolved," he said, "and skateboards have reached the point where almost any move is possible these days. My dream, if I ever have the money, is to open an indoor park to help skateboarding reach its fullest potential."



Neil went on to join the ENA Board (2014)