

Skating agqainst stigma

Jon
Solmundson



A chaotic mix of faded street art and graffiti cover the fractured walls of the concrete half pipe. Glass shards, take-away containers and empty bottles of cheap alcohol lie scattered around the derelict skate park.

You could be forgiven for thinking the Willeton Skate Park was designed to concentrate all petty crime in the area in one secluded corner, away from the public eye. Out of sight, out of mind.

A reputation for antisocial behaviour precedes many Perth skate parks, but the local skateboarding community hopes the new \$1.6 million Espanade Youth Plaza, built in the heart of Fremantle, will turn this image around. Skateboarding Australia coach James Ahern, who has been skating for more than nine years, says he expects the park to create new interest in the sport. "It's so central and people know where the Espanade is," he says.

"We're trying to get kids who prefer to sit in front of a computer with video games — kids who don't really enjoy team sports — outside."

"You've got little Creatures Brewery and Cicerolios just across the road. Kids

idiots in the world who will try to use it for a urinal or something else stupid," he says.

He adds, however, that not all skaters should be seen as disorderly or criminal.

Pigeonholed by the media, skate parks are considered dangerous places after dark.

Local skateboarder Lewis Rodan admits there is some truth to the stigma about skate parks, but says it has more to do with location.

"I agree a number of skate parks in Perth do seem to attract bored adolescents who engage in bad behaviour, but this is almost never accountable to skateboarders and BMX riders," Rodan says.

"I have had bad experiences myself at skate parks — getting mugged at knife-point as a teenager at Manning Skate Park and, even more recently, being verbally abused by alcoholic derelicts at the Freo park next to Captain Munchies."

Rodan hopes the new park will encourage the public to interact a little more with the skating culture, and put to rest some of the negative stereotypes.

"Being along the Espanade, a heavily monitored and populated area, the new plaza will deter these occurrences and if they do happen to occur, the instigators will not make it far," he says.

Now the park is complete. The crude fencing that once marred the Fremantle



EAGER: A young skater pushes off.

PHOTO: Daniel Goetke.

