

# Catch big air: Pascagoula skate park draws crowd

By MARGARET BAKER - mbbaker@sunherald.com

PASCAGOULA — Julian Skelton travels from Ocean Springs to Pascagoula to skateboard at least four times a week.

He's one of many of the sport's enthusiasts skateboarding their way around the Flagship City's new 4,000-square foot skate park at I.G. Levy Memorial Park on Chicot Street.

"We used to skate at churches and stuff but we'd get kicked out by police," Skelton said Friday. "Now, we come over about four times a week. It's free parking and no helmets. It's a great park to do tricks in."



PHOTOS BY WILLIAM COLGIN/SUN HERALD Clint Daniels gets some air as he jumps down a set of steps, just one of the obstacles at the newly opened Pascagoula skate park. The city used \$160,000 in taxpayer money and donations to build the park.

Skelton is among a growing number of skateboarders spending their leisure time at the new \$160,000 park featuring concrete ramps, hills and stairs to leap over.

Some new to the sport spend their time learning from the older, more experienced skaters. On Friday, many were learning for the first time how to perform an Ollie, a trick that skateboarders use to flip their board in the air to catch it.

Skelton, like some of the others at the park Friday, said they like to come to the Pascagoula park instead of one in Harrison County because admission to the Pascagoula park is free.

“This is a better park to skate in,” said Harrison County resident Jewel Cullen. “It’s good to do tricks in. Another good thing about the skate park is that we pretty much police our own. I live right down the street from the Harrison County skate park, but I’d still rather come here.”

The park was built five years after a few Pascagoula teens approached the City Council to ask for a place to go skateboarding. Now, the 4,000-square foot park is filled daily with skateboarders from in and out of town.

And to ensure everyone’s safety, Cullen said the older skateboarders like him usually keep an eye out for the younger ones should trouble arise.

“If we see things getting out of hand, we pretty much try to stop it,” he said. “If we see people throwing their trash down, we get them to pick it up. But that really doesn’t happen much. In my personal opinion, I think there’s a lot of team spirit out here. Everybody usually gets along.”

Mayor Matthew Avara was one of the leading advocates for a skate park in the city. He said he’s pleased to see more and more of the skateboarders coming to Pascagoula to skateboard.

Ashton McCoy and Eric Weathersby, both 8-year-old third graders at Jackson Elementary School, say they try to go to the new park every day because they’re able to walk there from their homes.

In addition to skateboarding, Weathersby said, the park offers other entertainment for him and his friends.

“It’s really fun.” he said. “Plus, when you get tired of skateboarding, you can go to the playground. And if you get tired of the playground, you can go back and skate. I never miss a day.”

A Kaboom playground is adjacent to the skate park.

To pay for the park’s construction, the city used \$100,000 in funds generated from their hotel/motel tax, \$27,000 from the general fund, \$23,000 in donations from Mississippi Power Co., and \$10,000 from the Tony Hawk Foundation.

Parks and Recreation Director Darcie Crew said the park's design was made based on what the skateboarders said they wanted in a skate park.