

Skateboarding in Eugene has its ups and downs

By Jason F. Jensen
Emerald Contributor

They're grinding, sliding and flipping around campus just searching for a piece of the concrete.

Don't worry, they're just skateboarders — dodging the authorities that seek to protect private and public property.

Otis Scarborough, a University Office of Public Safety officer, said skateboarding vandalism occurs frequently all over campus.

"The very nature of the tricks they do are things that cause damage," Scarborough said. "A person should feel like they can walk from one building to another and expect to make it in one piece."

However, Scarborough admits that the majority of skateboarding problems on campus are from non-University students.

Senior Dave Franklin defended skateboarders, saying OPS is blowing the campus problem out of proportion.

"It's not like we're trying to hurt anybody," Franklin said. "Everybody is just out for fun."

Franklin is one of many University students who have made skateboarding as routine as attending classes.

"Skateboarding adds to your daily life — it's a supplement," Franklin said. "It becomes a habit. ... It influences the way you think."

Franklin took an interest in skateboarding four years ago in high school when his friends began to skate. The speed and tricks attracted him. As a freshman at the University, he began skating every day, learning new tricks from watching videos and other skaters.

I just want to learn whatever I can, Franklin said. But it depends on personal moods and skating partners, he said.

"If you're skating with someone good, you get amped," Franklin said.

A skater who gets crazy, takes risks and tries new tricks can influence those around him, Franklin said.

Skateboarders sometimes separate themselves into different classes: freestyle, trick, street, old-school and new-school.

"There are silly divisions," Franklin said, "but to me it's all just skating."

Certain trends, however, follow these divisions. Old-school skaters will often stick to older boards and more conservative, speed-centered tricks. The new-school skaters are generally tagged by their sleek boards, enormous shirts and ankle-length shorts.

The structure of skateboards has constantly changed throughout their history, Franklin said.

The boards, generally made of wood, were designed with a flat, rounded nose and a wide tail. The tail slanted upward to allow the rider's back foot to tilt the board, turn it, flip it, or whatever.

But the skateboards have gradually developed uniformly. Their tails have shrunk and lost some of the tilt, and the noses have acquired their own upward slant. The wheels have become smaller, giving the rider faster acceleration. The board's lower center of gravity also allows better balance.

Overall, the street-boards are thinner and rounder so they can be flipped easier for technical tricks. Wider boards are used for skating quarter and half-pipes — huge ramps that extend to form a U-shape.

The biggest challenge for Eugene skateboarders is



Skateboarders make use of both city structures and University property, but the only designated place in Eugene to skateboard is in this Amazon Park bowl. Photo by Michael Shindler

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— Otis Scarborough,
OPS officer

finding an area to skate. Parking lots, curbs and concrete banks are targeted anywhere they can be found.

The type of trick performed usually depends on the terrain. Skaters first execute an "ollie," by flipping the board to catch air. They can then "slide" across an object on the underside of the board or "grind" by scraping along the wheel struts, also known as "trucks."

Skaters search for smooth concrete, Franklin said. Anything allowing a better slide — a bank or waxed curb — will help the trick. Many skaters actually use candle or surf wax on curbs for a smoother surface.

Property owners do not share the enthusiasm of skateboarders. Businesses often find skaters defacing their property and disturbing customers.

Tim Birr, Eugene police department spokesman, said he gets several complaints from property owners and businesses.

"I think they should respect people's property," said Ray Bates, manager of First Interstate Bank at 7th Avenue and Polk Street. He pointed to the long, black streaks on the sidewalk in front of the bank and shrugged his shoulders.

"Now I have to pay someone to come here and fix this," he said.

Bates said he did not mind if the skaters used the property during evenings or weekends.

"I don't want them out during banking hours," Bates said. "It's a safety hazard for the customers. I just ask them not to do it. I don't like to make a big issue of it."

Skaters have also been restricted from Eugene's downtown mall, and many "No Skateboarding" signs have been posted around the city.

Franklin said he realized this after being cuffed by police for skating in the mall. After the officers confirmed his identification, they let him go with a \$170 ticket, he said.

The only public skateboarding site in Eugene is a small concrete bowl in Amazon Park. But skaters are frustrated about being told where to skate.

Amilcar Cifuentes, a student at Lane Community College, insists that the Amazon bowl can be dangerous.

"They tell us to go up to that bowl, but how do you expect a hundred people to fit?" he said. "It's a good gesture, but it's just too small."

Cauli Lofgren, a University student, explained that in his hometown of Santa Rosa, Calif., there are no public skating facilities. He said he and his friends are happy to have the Amazon bowl.

"I wish there was more, but so does everybody," he said with a smile. "Better than nothing."

Franklin expressed disappointment with Eugene's lack of skating facilities.

"We'll keep getting tickets from the cops for skating where we're not supposed to because there's nowhere else to skate," Franklin said.

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