

Skateboarding at Woodside Park: A Photoessay.....*Photographs and Text by Lydia Polimeni*

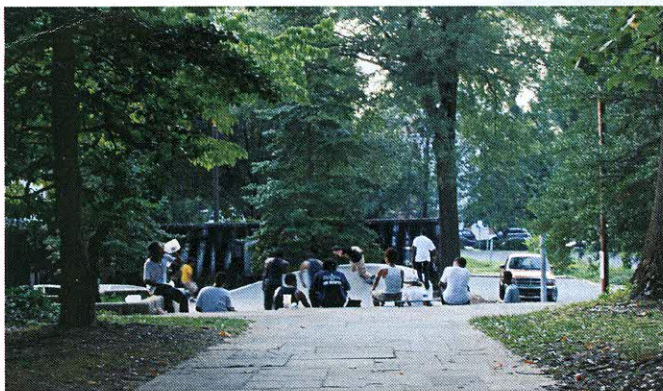
"It would be perfect for three people." That was the half-joking opinion of skater and White Oak resident Lene Rolling, 26, on the new skate park that recently opened in Woodside Park in Silver Spring.

The 3,000 square foot facility, erected by the Montgomery County Parks Department, sits tucked among the trees next to the basketball court. The official opening date was July 31, shortly after skateboarding was forbidden at Veteran's Plaza in downtown Silver Spring. Over the following weeks, young skaters from all over Montgomery County and DC have converged on the new skate spot, and the general consensus among them is that while the thought was nice, size still matters.

Chris Santis, a 15 year old who takes the bus from Olney to come skate at Woodside, had previously spoken out at a public meeting in support of the park being built. Now that it's here, his opinion is that "it's pretty good so far, but it can get hectic." Anthony Ross, 18, concurred, "There's just not enough room for everyone, but I like it so far; it's better than nothing." Even Spohn Ranch, the California based company that actually designed and built the park, writes on their website that the Woodside Park Urban Skate Spot is "not large enough to accommodate a city's entire skateboarding community" (although it can be "a valuable addition to the spectrum of recreational facilities.") As the park has become increasingly congested, skaters have decided to appeal to public officials for a larger or additional facility, recently submitting a video of their concerns and suggestions to the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board.

Along with size, crime has become a concern at the new skate park. Police were called to the scene August 6 when two skaters used their boards to assault a man on the adjacent basketball court. In a separate incident, a skater was arrested for smoking marijuana. While skateboarders are often stereotyped as trouble-makers, the skaters themselves have also expressed concern over the somewhat secluded location of the park, and the need for bright lights to be installed so that they may use the park safely after dark, especially in the colder months. Robin, a Woodside resident and mother of young skater Jason Rupli, 6, said she has seen nothing to concern her among the skating population at Woodside. The older kids are patient with her little one and she says, "The park is separate, it's focused, what's not to like? Kids have a one track mind when they're here; it's all about skating."

The fate of the park is ultimately in the hands of the Parks Department. As the space is a temporary part of a long term renovation of Woodside Park, a yearly evaluation and decision will be made as to whether or not to keep the spot open.



Above and below, skaters resting



*Above, skaters cramped, but in action.
Below, Lene Rolling (26) of White Oak*

