

Plans under way for Lincoln skate park

Parents, skateboarders hope for funding

By JASON HARDY
Staff writer

When Lincoln Police officers find people skateboarding in the downtown area, they usually send them away by means of a warning ticket, a fine or an escort. On the way out of the area, the officers let the criminals know they were in one of the places where skateboarding is prohibited.

Still, one question remains: Where can they skate?

For that question, the police — or anyone else for that matter — have no answer.

But at today's meeting for the Lincoln Park Board, the question might finally be answered.

The Lincoln Rollerpark Association, a group of more than 400 local skateboarders, in-line skaters, parents, business people and other concerned citizens, hope the board will approve its plan to build a public skate park at Van Dorn Park, 9th and Van Dorn streets.

Barbara Micek, co-chairwoman of the Lincoln Rollerpark Association, said she was confident the park board would pass the proposal.

"What the park board wanted us to do was come up with a plan and design for Van Dorn Park, and that's what the architects have done," Micek said. "What we're presenting to them is what they wanted to see, so I can't imagine that it wouldn't be approved."

Providing the park board approves the plan, the next step is a neighborhood meeting to notify area residents of the project. After that, it goes before the City Council for the final say.

The proposed 22,500-square-foot skate park blueprints were designed by the Lincoln architectural firm of Bahr, Vermeer & Haecker and feature numerous state-of-the-art ramps, bowls and even a street course.

The skate park comes with an estimated price tag of \$225,000, which the Lincoln Rollerpark Association, a nonprofit organization, is expected to raise through donations. Micek, however, hopes the Lincoln City Council will help with at least some of the cost.

"The city council would like to see us raise that money on our own, but we're hoping they'll match some of our money when they see the kind of revenue that can be generated," Micek said. "We haven't had the opportunity to discuss it with them, but we've gotten feedback that leads us to think

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BARBARA MICEK
co-chairwoman of Lincoln Rollerpark Association

they'll be very supportive.”

Phil Burcher, co-founder of the Lincoln Rollerpark Association and owner of Precision Skateboards, said he was confident the group could raise the money.

"I feel really positive about it," Burcher said. "We have a lot of plans coming up and the kids are even out there with their little cans raising money. It's just great because stuff is finally happening."

For Burcher, this park has been a 13-year vision in the making — a vision that has persisted despite being bogged down with bureaucratic red tape and organizational problems.

He said for the most part any opposition to the skate park was founded on confusion rather than factual problems with the project.

"I think the No. 1 thing is a lack of understanding of what a skate park is and what it can provide for the city," he said. "As long as we're legitimate there really is no reason for them to say no. It really is a positive thing."

Micek said a skate park would not only give skateboarders and in-line skaters a legal place to ride, but it would also bring parents and families from surrounding towns and communities into Lincoln, in turn generating revenue at local stores and restaurants.

To Micek, whose son is a skateboarder, the most important reason for this skate park is the people who will use it.

"I think it's important to recognize that all kids don't choose to recreate in the same way. It's great that we have a lot of baseball diamonds, but not every kid likes baseball," Micek said.

"I think our kids deserve to have a safe and exciting place to skateboard and in-line skate. We don't expect kids who play basketball to play in the street, so why don't we help kids that skate?"

"The need is there and now the city just needs to recognize that."

Peace negotiations fail; Kosovo fighting escalates

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — A top U.S. negotiator failed to persuade Yugoslavia's president to sign onto a new Kosovo peace deal Wednesday. Along the border, Yugoslav forces backed by tanks torched the homes of ethnic Albanians and sent hundreds fleeing.

Following eight hours of talks, American envoy Richard Holbrooke said there had been "no change" in President Slobodan Milosevic's opposition to the Kosovo peace plan. Holbrooke planned to return to Washington today to brief the Clinton administration.

"We had very engaged, very intense talks today," Holbrooke said, including "every aspect of the situation in Kosovo."

On the ground in Kosovo, the U.N. refugee agency said it had reports of at least four villages burning in the hills and hundreds of ethnic Albanians fleeing the border area — 4,000 over the past week.

Three bodies were found — at least two of them men who had been shot in the back in Ivaja, a hamlet near the Macedonia border where homes burned by Yugoslav troops still smoldered.

Residents said neither man was a rebel in the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army. The identity of the third victim was not clear.

One of the victims had called on a mobile phone to say that Serb police were coming into the village and that residents were fleeing, a neighbor said.

More than 2,000 people have died and 300,000 have been displaced in a year of fighting between Yugoslav troops and ethnic Albanian rebels in Kosovo.

Milosevic said the U.S.-sponsored peace plan is "a good basis" for a political settlement of the Kosovo crisis. But he continued to reject the key provision — the deployment of NATO troops to police it.

His government-run television denounced "aggressive" U.S. policies and called for the defense of Kosovo. During the 10-minute program apparently aimed at preparing Serbs for an armed showdown with the West, a Yugoslav army officer declared "the defense of Kosovo has no price" and that Yugoslavia "must deal with domestic traitors who say we cannot fight against the whole world."

The U.S.-sponsored deal calls for

wide autonomy for Kosovo Albanians but not the independence that they seek, and for 28,000 NATO troops — including 4,000 Americans — to police a settlement.

Milosevic believes stationing NATO forces is tantamount to Western intervention in Yugoslavia, made up of Serbia and the much-smaller Montenegro. Kosovo is a Serbian province, but 90 percent of its 2 million people are ethnic Albanian.

Holbrooke had been instrumental in forging a Bosnia peace deal with Milosevic in 1995 and a shaky cease-fire in Kosovo last October that has unraveled with new fighting this year.

But this plan was even in trouble with Kosovo Albanians, who were apparently backsliding on their pledge to sign the deal. A KLA representative in London, Pleurat Sejdiu, said the rebels would "not sign up while the war is going on in Kosovo."

The plan also requires the rebels to disarm, a serious obstacle for the secessionist-minded guerrillas.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Sen. Bob Dole on Wednesday asked Kosovo's ethnic Albanians to press their leaders to sign the plan.

Lake: Action is key in Yugoslavia

By BRIAN CARLSON
Staff writer

Although the crisis in Kosovo offers no easy solutions, the United States should be closely engaged in the situation now rather than face greater challenges down the road, Anthony Lake said this week.

Lake, national security adviser to President Clinton from 1993 to 1996, was in Lincoln on Tuesday to deliver a lecture for the E.N. Thompson Forum on World Issues.

In an interview, he said the Clinton administration must explain that a strong U.S. commitment to peace in Kosovo promotes both humanitarian and U.S. national interests.

"We have important interests in the region," he said. "Obviously we have vital interests in Europe as a whole. Unhappily, it has proven impossible for the Europeans themselves to handle the situation."

Unfortunately, Lake said, the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the warring parties make it difficult to bring peace to the region.

Kosovo is a small province in Serbia populated mostly by ethnic Albanians, known as Kosovars. The Kosovo Liberation Army, representing the ethnic Albanians, wants independence. The Serbian government, led by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, has suppressed the KLA insurgency, resulting in several mas-

acres of civilians.

The United States and several European countries now are attempting to broker an agreement that would grant self-rule to Kosovo, with a possibility of independence in the future.

President Clinton has proposed that the United States contribute 4,000 troops to a NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo, provided an agreement is reached.

The deal currently is on hold, with Milosevic refusing to accept NATO troops on Serbian territory. KLA support for the plan also appears tenuous.

Lake said the current proposal offers Kosovo the possibility of Western support for independence, while giving Serbia another chance to prove it can govern all its territory fairly.

But the proposal's slim prospects of success require the United States to consider other options, Lake said. At some point, when a country such as Serbia shows enough irresponsibility in internal governance, it forfeits its right to sovereignty over its current territory.

"In the end, if neither the Serbs nor the Kosovars accept this deal — which I suspect will happen — then we are going to have to find a way to put independence on the table," he said.

It makes no sense, Lake said, for the West to send troops to keep a country together if its national differences prevent such an arrangement.

"I don't mean to imply for a sec-

ond, though, that there's an easy solution," he said.

However the crisis is ultimately settled, the United States has national interests in the Balkans, Lake said.

Noting that World War I began in the Balkans, Lake said the Kosovo crisis, if unchecked, could escalate and spread into neighboring countries such as Albania, Macedonia and NATO members Greece and Turkey.

While in the Clinton administration, Lake helped coordinate policy on Bosnia, another site of ethnic warfare in the Balkans. After four years of warfare there, the warring parties struck a peace agreement that has been successfully enforced by a NATO force that includes U.S. troops.

If the West is to achieve and preserve peace in Kosovo as it has in Bosnia, Lake said, a peacekeeping operation must combine military enforcement with democratic reforms, including elections, economic reforms and the establishment of police forces.

The challenge, he said, is to develop a peacekeeping strategy that does not require U.S. troops to remain indefinitely. For example, one colleague told Lake he thought a peacekeeping operation in Kosovo would require a 50-year commitment.

That would be both wrong and politically impossible, Lake said.

"The key to our ability to pursue an endgame is to combine military operations with effective civilian structures."

APU attends black leadership conference

By VERONICA DAEHN
Staff writer

Members of UNL's Afrikan People's Union came away from the 22nd Annual Big 12 Conference on Black Student Government with some new ideas for promoting black leadership on campus.

"The Awakening: Reviving the Struggle" was the theme for this year's event, held in February at the University of Colorado in Boulder. About 35 University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, staff and faculty members attended.

APU President Kenny Bailey said the conference, which was designed to give black students from predominantly white campuses the chance to interact with other black students, provided ideas on what campus leaders could do to promote participation among black students.

"We talked about the importance of graduating and retaining colored students at white campuses," Bailey said. "Sometimes we build up numbers and then students transfer to another school."

N. Omar Valentine, UNL's Big 12 coordinator, agreed that the conference was beneficial.

He said learning how students get along at other schools in the conference was inspiring.

"We have a small African-American population," Valentine said. "A sense of family and unity is lacking here."

The conference was good for communication, Valentine said.

The two workshops he was able to attend and the topic of the speaker he heard were oriented toward issues other Big 12 schools are facing, he said.

"We were able to see how they dealt with problems, and there were a lot of ideas," he said.

Out of the estimated 1,000 people who attended the conference, Bailey received the Alvin Ailey Award for Arts and Entertainment.

This is the second year a UNL student has won the award, Bailey said.

Bailey received the award in part for the work he's done on his show "Groove Sessions" on the campus radio station KRNU-FM (90.3). He began the show as a showcase for urban music.

Bailey also was recognized for writing a play titled "Strange Relationship" that he hopes to see produced by the end of the year.

"He helped Nebraska provide entertainment for African Americans," Valentine said.

The conference workshops helped provide ideas to promote student involvement, Valentine said.

"Certain things need to be done to revive interest," he said. "The workshops inspired a lot of students from Nebraska."

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