

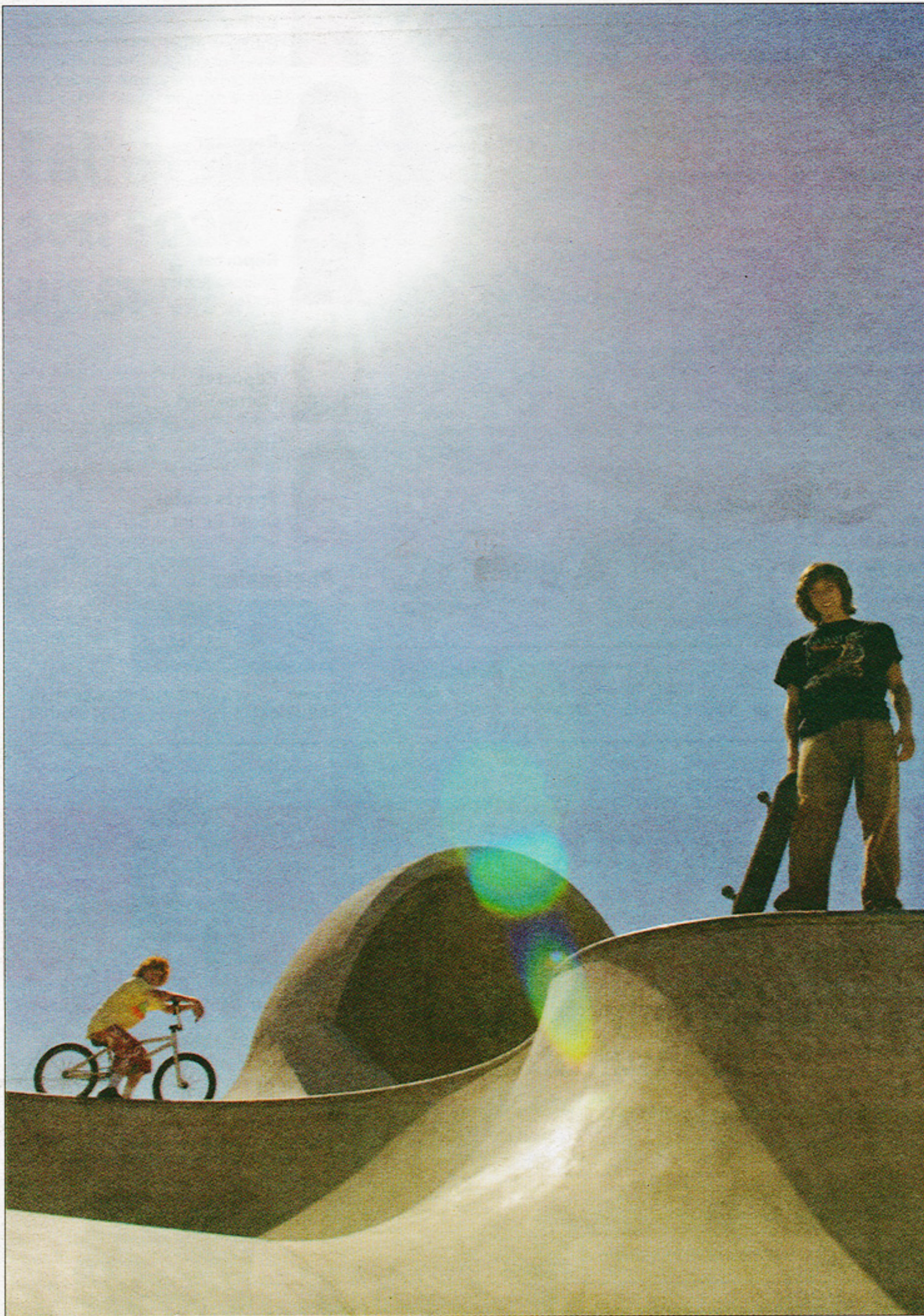
Knox Leader

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Skate debate ramps up

William Jackson

A STOUGH is brewing over whether Knox's much-loved old skate bowl in Knoxfield should be retained.

Knox Council plans to demolish the Lewis Park skate bowl in February after the finishing touches have been put on the new \$650,000 skate park at Gilbert Park, also in Knoxfield.

The new skate ramp was completed on December 21 with final site works, including car parking and landscaping, to be finished this month.

It has already proven extremely popular, with hundreds of skaters putting it to the test over the Christmas/New Year period.

Director of community services Kerry Stubbings said the Knox City Council Skate and BMX Plan, adopted in 2002 after extensive community consultation and engagement with young people, stated the need for one regional skate park in Knox.

"Council has invested its resources into providing and operating a state-of-the-art facility at Gilbert Park in recognition that the older Lewis Park facility is not contemporary," Ms Stubbings said.

"Lewis Park Reserve skate ramp was built approximately 20 years ago and the infrastructure does not meet current trends and standards.

"It also is not well connected to amenities, and is in an isolated area."

Chair of the Knox Skate and BMX Park Reference Group, and coun-

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Lewis Park Reserve skate ramp was built approximately 20 years ago and the infrastructure does not meet current trends and standards.

KERRY STUBBINGS

cillor for Friberg Ward, Debbie Field, said the new facility was a "feather in the cap" of local sports and leisure facilities.

However, some have criticised the new ramp as being difficult for beginners and there are growing calls for the old bowl to be repaired and retained.

Ryan Whitting, from BMX Mad in Boronia, said the bowl provided a gentler learning curve and was more "family friendly".

"The new one is more of an advanced skate park and with so many people there it can be very intimidating for families," he said.

Skaters hoping to save the original skate bowl have organised a fun day at the Lewis Park site on Sunday, January 13, at noon.

More on the skate debate: Page 8.

BMX rider Jake Amos, 14, of Upwey, and skateboarder Russell Polec, 15, of Ferntree Gully, try out the new \$650,000 facilities at Gilbert Park.

Picture: STEVE TANNER N28KN858

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Old bowl still useful

William Jackson

KNOX'S old skate bowl is a unique facility with historic significance and should be saved, local skateboarders and BMX riders say.

The Lewis Park facility was built in 1989 for \$45,000 and was one of the first in Victoria constructed below ground level.

BMX rider David Lalama, who grew up in Wantirna but now lives in South Melbourne, learnt his first tricks at Lewis Park.

He said it presented a very different challenge to the new skate ramp at Gilbert Park.

"The old bowl is a unique facility that encompasses different riding and skating skills to the new facility," he said.

"It also caters to people of all skill levels from beginner to professional. The new bowl only caters to intermediate to advanced skaters/riders."

In the past it had been a training ground for many champion riders and had a reputation that drew people from across the country, he said.

"It's a part of Australia's skateboarding and bike riding history," he said.

"A lot of Australia's top riders and skateboarders rode there."

The Lewis Park skate bowl is located in Cr Adam Gill's Dinsdale Ward.

Cr Gill said he was sympathetic to those who wanted to see it retained.

He said the council provided a



Russell Polec (above), of Ferntree Gully, and Ben, of Knoxfield, try out the new skate ramp.

Pictures: STEVE TANNER N28KN858

huge range of sporting grounds for club sports and questioned why there couldn't be two facilities that catered for alternative activities.

While he conceded the bowl needed repairs to bring it up to a safe standard, he said it would cost about the same to fix it as to demolish it.

"It's still a great asset," he said. "It was built extremely well in

comparison to other skate parks at the time.

"Why would you get rid of an asset that provided opportunities for young people?"

He said he would lobby the mayor and council to have the bowl saved.

Mr Lalama has set up an online petition to save the Lewis Park bowl at www.myspace.com/saveknoxbowl.



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