

Group works to make skateboard park a reality

BY JENNIFER KNOCHA

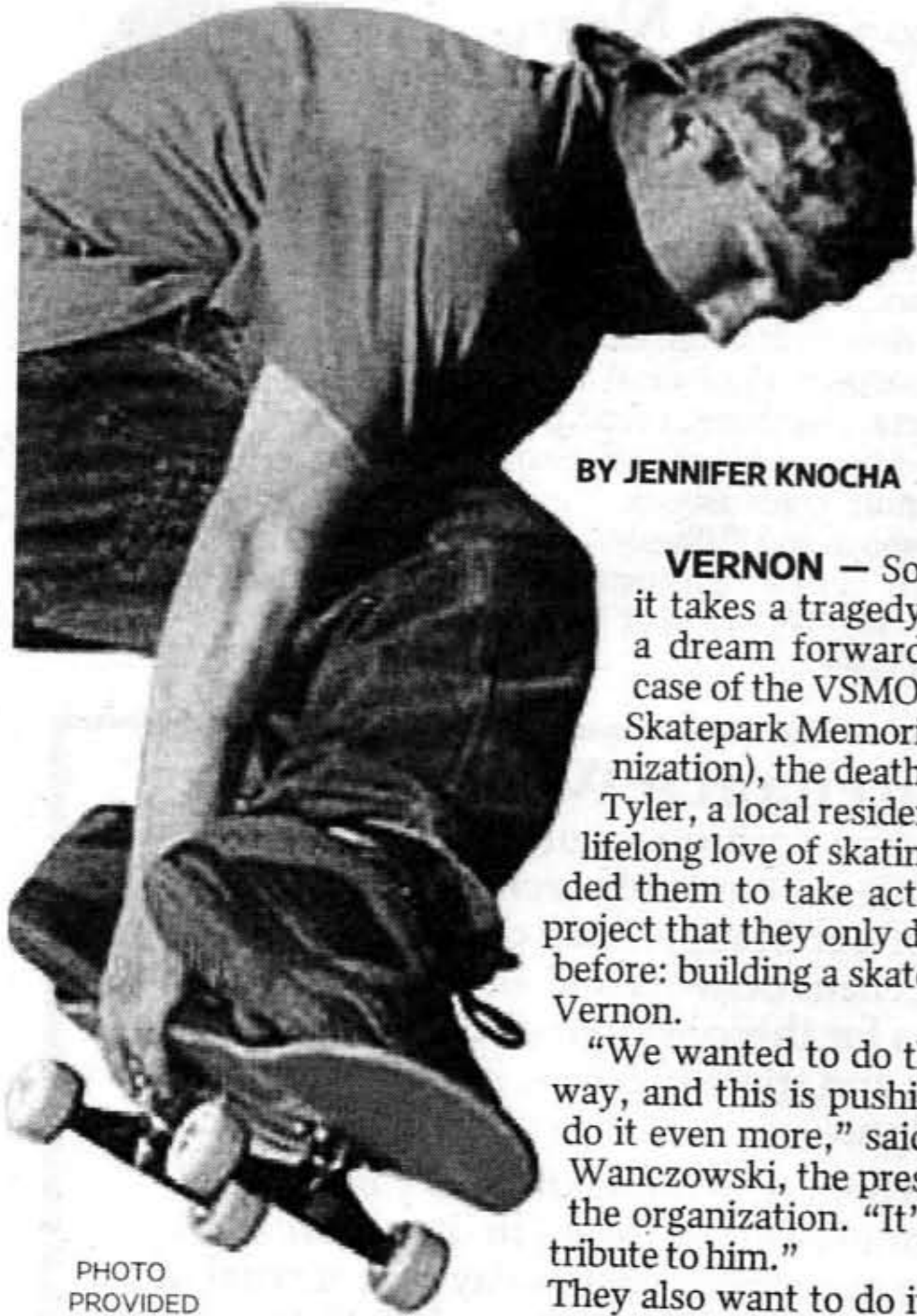


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Outkast Sports team rider Drew performs a deft maneuver at night near the shop. A skatepark would give Drew and others more room to roam.

VERNON — Sometimes it takes a tragedy to push a dream forward. In the case of the VSMO (Vernon Skatepark Memorial Organization), the death of Chris Tyler, a local resident with a lifelong love of skating, prodded them to take action on a project that they only discussed before: building a skate park in Vernon.

“We wanted to do this anyway, and this is pushing us to do it even more,” said Steven Wanczowski, the president of the organization. “It’s a little tribute to him.”

They also want to do it for the next generations of skaters. “We used to get up in the morning, go to one parking lot, skate until we got chased off, then go to the next parking lot and skate more until we got chased off again. We would

work our way through town every day. With the skatepark, the future generations of skaters wouldn’t have to worry about being chased off or traffic and it would give kids something to do.”

They’ve already taken the first steps towards making it happen, by holding a public meeting July 31 and a fundraising concert at Hidden Valley on Aug. 9, which raised over \$2,000. But it’s a long road ahead. Wanczowski estimates that it will cost approximately \$1 million dollars to build a one-acre park, and he admits that this is just a rough number. To come up with it, the group has spoken to several skatepark construction companies, primarily Grindline, a Seattle-based company that has built parks around the world. Troy McColl, a Vernon native and member of the VSMO, has worked for Grindline in the past, and will bring that experience to the table as well.

Luckily, during a June meeting, Vernon Township agreed to give the group one acre for the park once they’ve established a budget, a base of funds and a solid construction plan — but they won’t know where that land will be until then. The current plan calls for three stages: First, a site survey and land clearing, which will then allow for bidding on the construction of the park itself. Stage two is the landscaping and parking lot construction, and finally, phase three will be building the park.

For now, the group is waiting for approval of its nonprofit status, which will take three to six months. During the wait, they are doing as much planning as they can.

“Every day we figure out a little more of what we have to do. We had the concert and it was great. We’d like to do the same thing again, but make it bigger this time. Maybe we could get more bands

and make it an all-day show,” said Wanczowski.

They’re also looking to get the community involved, hoping to get donations of labor and materials from local businesses and sponsorships from equipment manufacturers.

It won’t happen soon enough for the local skaters though. “Kids are already asking, ‘Where is it going to be?’ and ‘When will it be done?’ And I want to have something to tell them soon,” said Wanczowski. Realistically, he thinks it could take as long as five years to build the park, though he’s hoping for more like three. After all, he wants to skate the park too.

WANT TO HELP?

To help make the park a reality, contact the VSMO through Outkast Sports at 973-209-6763 or e-mail info@vernonskatepark.org or at vernonskatepark.org.