



RUBY HILL

Ruby Hill is the only free, urban snowboard park in the country and is a huge draw for new, local snowboarders. PHOTO: DAVE WATSON, WATSONPHOTO.COM

Bringing The Park To The City

Ruby Hill Rail Yard Introduces Snowsports To A New Generation

By Michael Sudmeier

For most kids, getting to ride requires a range of variables to fall perfectly in place. Before they can make a single turn, these riders often need to procure equipment, find transportation to their local ski area, and purchase lift tickets. After adding the expenses associated with these challenges, hitting the slopes is anything but simple. In Denver, however, going riding requires nothing more than a walk to the park.

Since 2007, Winter Park and the city of Denver have collaborated to create a terrain park within the city. Each winter, the Ruby Hill Rail Yard attracts more than 6,000 skiers and snowboarders. Free of charge, they can rent equipment and hone their skills on an acre of terrain filled with rails and boxes. Thanks to a team of dedicated volunteers, this urban terrain park is kept in pristine condition. Yet for these volunteers, Ruby Hill's success is measured not by the features they install, but by the smiles and opportunities they help create.

After facilitating numerous rail jams at high schools and colleges, Bob Holme, Winter Park's youth marketing manager and terrain park operations manager, recognized the feasibility and value of bringing a terrain park to the city. In 2006, Holme and Winter Park—which is owned by the city of Denver—proposed creating a terrain park within the city.

Within a few minutes of discussing this idea with staff from Denver

Parks and Recreation, Holme had full support from city officials. As he explains, "They really started seeing it as an asset that we could bring into the park system and provide to some of the underserved communities." The city also found value in reaching a younger demographic through the park system. After examining numerous sites, the group chose Ruby Hill, a park located in a predominately Hispanic community. The group hoped that this location would create opportunities to ski and snowboard among children and families who may not otherwise have them.

When the mercury dropped in January 2007, Winter Park fired up snow guns and blanketed the hill with several feet of snow. Thanks to a million gallons of snowmaking, six rails, a program that offered free lessons, and a crew of committed volunteers, the Ruby Hill Rail Yard attracted more than 3,000 visitors in its inaugural year.

"After the first year, we learned a lot," explains Holme. Visitors and the police would often park their cars and aim their headlights at the rails, allowing for night ses-

sions. Fortunately, Musco donated lights the following year. In 2009, Christy Sports began offering free rental equipment. Throughout the years, organizations like SOS Outreach have also aided Ruby Hill in facilitating free programs that teach the basics of skiing and snowboarding. Yet Ruby Hill has also faced challenges. In its short history, the park has failed to open twice due to especially warm winters.

Nonetheless, Ruby Hill has worked to eliminate the traditional barriers and expenses associated with getting on the snow. Juan Alberto De la Roca can attest to this. In addition to being the president of Equipo Roca, a firm that provides insights into the intersections of marketing and culture, he has volunteered at Ruby Hill since its inception. "Ruby Hill is valuable because it aids in the introduction of the snowsports lifestyle," De la Roca explains. "It's amazing how many kids have never been on the mountain."

Volunteers like De la Roca handle the park's daily operations. A typical night involves shoveling and raking, ensuring boxes and rails are safely installed, promoting the free rentals, and soliciting visitor surveys. In exchange for their ongoing assistance, volunteers receive a season pass to Winter Park. Once a week, personnel

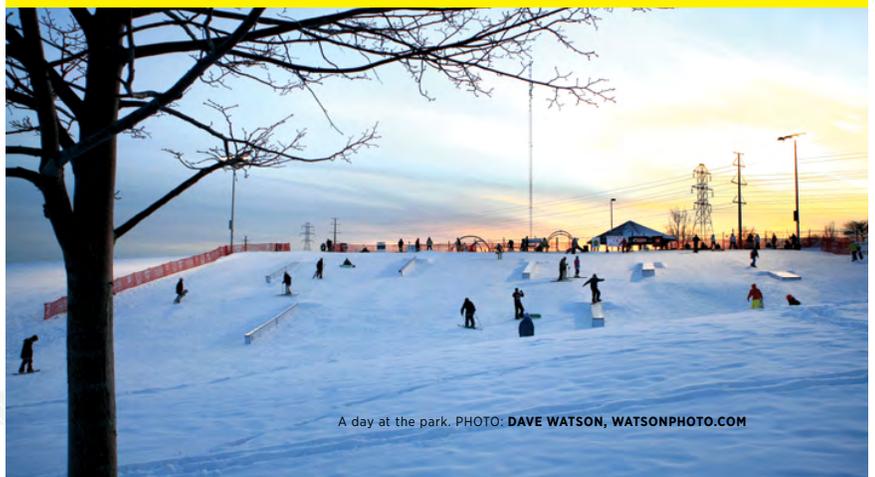
from the resort groom Ruby Hill using a snowcat kept on the premises.

According to volunteers, Ruby Hill is capable of changing lives. Brian Phipps, SOS Outreach's regional program director for the Front Range, recalls how the park impacted one young girl. After visiting Ruby Hill with her school and receiving free lessons through the Jibbin' 4 Kids program, Phipps explains, "She loved it so much that she came on following weekends to continue teaching herself how to ride the boxes. She had been self-motivated and confident enough to keep coming back and really learn the sport." For Phipps, the experience summarizes what Ruby Hill is all about: encouraging youth to cultivate new skills and build their self-esteem.

For De la Roca, Ruby Hill also provides an opportunity to share his excitement for snowboarding and encourage others to participate. "The best memories for me are the moments when I get to use my Spanish," he explains. "Being able to tell the park's story and my experience in snowboarding in a culturally relevant manner brings me a great deal of satisfaction, mostly because there aren't a lot of resources to inform Hispanics about snowsports."

In addition to making plenty of kids smile, Ruby Hill has served as a model for other communities. Holme has assisted cities like Lansing, Michigan, in developing their own terrain parks. Thanks to these urban offerings, snowsports are gradually becoming more accessible across the nation. And, as Holme notes, these parks are creating "an awesome vibe. You'll have somebody on a 50-dollar Target setup next to a kid on a thousand-dollar setup. Both could be trying the same trick and cheering each other on."

GETTING THERE: Ruby Hill Rail Yard is located between West Florida and Jewell Avenues and between South Platte River Drive and Quivas Street about six miles south of the Convention Center at Ruby Hill Park.



A day at the park. PHOTO: DAVE WATSON, WATSONPHOTO.COM