



George Wilson at Hart's Surf Shop Ramp, 1976



Jimmy Plumer, 1978



Brad Santora at Village Inn pool on Eighth Avenue North in 1978



Mike Kaufman at Village Inn pool, 1978



George Wilson at Kona in 1978 (above) and in 1977 (right)



Lords of Rattown A new exhibit revisits Jax Beach's glory days as a skateboard Mecca

Jacksonville is arguably an East Coast hub for pop punk, surfing and slow-cooked barbecue. But there was a time when it was a kingdom for quad-wheeled boards and their riders. In Jax Beach in the mid- and late-1970s, the kingdom

was known as “Rattown,” and the dynasty that ruled it was known as the Z-East Boys.

Anyone who knows it's best to store wheels in the freezer — or honestly, anyone who's ever even owned a pair of Vans — knows about the original Z-Boys, the innovative, talented group of teenage skaters in Santa Monica, Calif. in the mid-'70s. But not everyone knows of the bi-coastal kinship formed in those years. When teenage Jax Beach skater Jimmy Plumer's parents divorced and he was sent to spend the summers at his dad's place in Santa Monica, a monumental convergence occurred.

“Jimmy met [Z-Boys] Tony Alva and Jay Adams there,” recalls

local skate and surf legend Mitch Kaufman, longtime buddy of Plumer's. “He'd come back in the fall and tell us these stories about Santa Monica and we thought he was full of shit ... It was just too crazy. Whatever stories you've heard about the Z-Boys — times two in real life. If you do that stuff in Florida, you'd be in jail!”

Jacksonville Beach and Santa Monica soon joined forces in pushing the envelope of the developing skateboarding world — an evolving sport enabled by the creation of agile urethane wheels and the adaptation of surfing moves to asphalt and concrete surroundings. “The Z-Boys dominated on the West Coast and

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Z-East dominated on the East,” says Kaufman.

That history is the focus of a new skateboarding exhibit called “Dropping In,” opening this month at the Beaches Museum and History Center in Jacksonville Beach. A mix of photographs and physical memorabilia, the show homes in on the Z-East Boys, the evolution of Kona Skatepark and Jacksonville’s history of skating. It includes a documentary of original footage and interviews with those denizens of the Beaches’ pre-PacSun days.

Kaufman, an Atlantic Beach native whose personal collection makes up the bulk of the show, says he saved a lot of the era’s history. “Since I was a big skateboarder in the ’70s, I’ve got an incredible amount of archive on the history of skating in the local scene [including] skateboards, posters, equipment.” He continues, “Back then, it was underground and it was illegal and it was this skateboarding, bad-boy image. Now it’s this multi-billion-dollar industry ... much bigger than surfing [since] you can skate in any town in the world.”

The exhibit was organized as an echo of a similar exhibit at the museum two years ago, which focused on the local history of surfing. Kaufman says he and other organizers of the surf exhibit expected only about 300 folks to attend the opening party, but more than twice that number turned up.

“It’s going to be a giant reunion of skateboarders, young and old,” Kaufman promises.

The story of Jacksonville’s past will likely be news to a lot of the younger wave of skaters, especially the existence of the rag-tag Z-East Boys. It certainly was to Mike Peterson. Though he’s a pro who’s been skating Jacksonville since he was a tyke in 1987, Peterson admits he wasn’t hip to the Z-East Boys until Kaufman wised him up.

“I think that’s a pretty cool aspect of Jacksonville’s skate history maybe a lot of people don’t know,” says Peterson, who is slated to attend the opening night party.

By the time the Z-East team converged, Kaufman was turning his focus more toward surfing and assisting in the opening of Kona Skatepark in 1978, but he undoubtedly helped spearhead the developing passion for skateboarding in the area, cruising the streets in search of new spots.

“Before we could drive, we’d ride our bikes as far as we could before the sun went down to find new places to skate,” Kaufman says. “Everything was new and different. It was just another cement wave.”

His inspiration spilled over to his little brother Mike, who ended up hopping on board as one of the original Z-East Boys along with Mike Cox, Scott Green and Micah Allebach, among others. “Dropping In” also commemorates the late Bob Biniak, an original Z-Boy who died while visiting Kaufman and other friends in Jacksonville Beach last February. Additional skate wunderkinds scheduled to mingle at the exhibit’s opening reception on Saturday, June 12 include Plumer, Buck Smith and yet another original Z-Boy, Jay Adams.

Two awards ceremonies go down as well, with trophies going to winners of a surf and skate contest being held earlier in the day, and an induction ceremony by The Florida Skateboard Hall of Fame. Festivities kick-flip at 7 p.m. and grind until 10 p.m. at Beaches Museum and History Center, 380 Pablo Ave., Jacksonville Beach. Tickets are \$10 in advance; \$15 at the door, available at bm-hm.com. 241-5657. □

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