



# Skate Haven Brings Community Together

WEDNESDAY, 07 APR 2010 - LAUREN LEE

To see skateboarding video, click [Skate Haven Brings Community Together](#)

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** - Children from inner city communities all over Memphis are coming together in an Uptown rec center to hit a skateboarding half pipe, and it's only been open for less than six weeks.

Kids from all over Memphis have already made it one of the most popular after school attractions in the city. The little skaters are already so skilled, it's hard to believe none of them had been on a skateboard before March when the half pipe opened.

Martezhun Reddick, at only six years old, is the youngest of the 75 kids who skate here every day. "I like to be skateboarding," says Martezhun.

Martezhun joins kids from all over Memphis: from North Memphis to Orange Mound to Collierville to Germantown. They're kids who may not ordinarily meet, but are now friends. Diversity is a goal of **Memphis Athletic Ministries**, who runs this program.

"A lot of kids in urban communities are territorial, so to have kids be able to play in a safe haven, to build relationships to be able to do it in a skate community, only helps us to better the community," says **Kelvin Bowen, Executive Vice President of Memphis Athletic Ministries**.

**Mark Jannetta** is the counselor who works with the kids day to day. He's taught them the basics and now some kids are learning tricks. In making the half pipe such a popular after school activity he says these kids are breaking skater stereotypes.

"It doesn't matter whether a kid is black or white or yellow or green or blue or anything else," says Jannetta. "A kid is a kid and if it's fun, they're going to do it."

Jannetta says the half pipe is a way to get to the kids. After they play, they are mentored. And he says it's working; the kids are growing as more than just athletes. They're learning perseverance. Falling down teaches the kids to get back up. Skating is building their confidence.

"I know how to do lots of things," says 10-year old skater Cedric Sesley. "Like jumping, do a fake, and lots of stuff."

"It's great, you meet new people and do new things," says 10-year old skater John Colbert.

About one third of the skaters are girls. "People think it's a boy sport but it's not," says Bobbie Graves. "It could be a girl or boy sport. Girls can do anything boys can do."

For some of the kids, the introduction to the half pipe could be a life long activity. Martezhun says he wants to be a pro skater when he grows up.

"It's just the best thing," says Martezhun.

The half pipe is possible because of grants and donations. And now, there's a movement to try and get a new quarter of a million dollar skate park in Binghampton, but the project needs votes to win a grant from Pepsi.

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