

Justin Pellman, 18, of Fredericksburg, Ind., catches air above the rim of the Vert Ramp at Waterfront Skate Park, Sunday, Nov. 26, 2006 in Louisville, Ky.

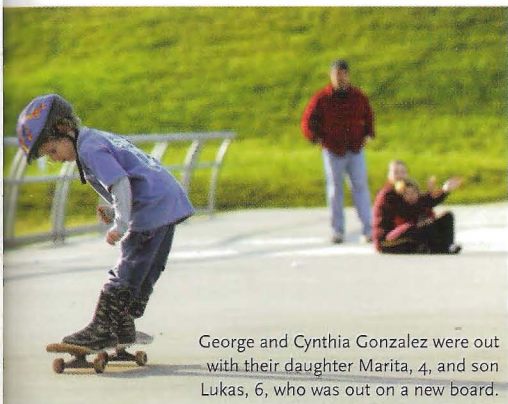


PARK IT IN LOUISVILLE

One and one-half million visitors can't be wrong.

By Doug Stern | Photos Brian Bohannon

That's how many people came to Louisville's Waterfront Park last year. Hundreds of thousands more caught a ballgame at Slugger Field, plied the Ohio River on the Belle of Louisville, basked on the downtown Belvedere, checked out the downtown skyline from southern Indiana or rolled through the Louisville Extreme Park.



George and Cynthia Gonzalez were out with their daughter Marita, 4, and son Lukas, 6, who was out on a new board.

Janet and Allen Cobbs and their four kids, ages eight to 14, are part of the headcount. They stopped by the Extreme Park recently on their way back to Cincinnati after visiting relatives in Evansville.

"Our oldest heard about Louisville's skate park from a friend," Janet explained. "The park was the biggest we've ever seen."

George and Cynthia Gonzalez brought their kids to the park the same day. Their four-year-old daughter was having a blast, and her six-year-old big brother was mastering a new board.

Locals like the Gonzalezes brag that the skate park (<http://www.louisvilleextremepark.org>) is one of the nation's best, with features that include a 24-foot full-pipe. The 40,000 square foot park, completed in April 2002, is open 24/7.

Angela Satterly brings her kids and their friends from their Fern Creek neighborhood about once a month to blade, bike or board. "My oldest is 14 and a pretty good skateboarder," Angela said. "When we've offered to try other parks, he says 'Why bother? Louisville's is the best.'"

The success of Extreme Park owes a lot to the granddaddy of Louisville's riverfront renewal, the Waterfront Development Corporation (<http://www.louisvillewaterfront.com>), established in 1986. It planned, built and manages the award-winning Waterfront Park, which recently wrapped up its third phase and is ready to kick off the fourth and final chunk.

The currently 85-acre riverfront park has become a huge people-magnet, matching up with some of the most-visited attractions anywhere. And, judging from the crowds it pulls in all day, every day, it's the most diverse, international spot in Louisville.

"My board members say that Waterfront Park seems to be everybody's park," noted David Karem, head of the development corporation.

Karem explains that the park—designed by Hargreaves Associates, San Francisco—is regularly studied by other waterfront park planners and dreamers. That includes delegations from the Ukraine, the Yangtze River basin, Hungary and dozens of groups from the States.

Join the crowd. ■