



Small town draws big crowds for opening of top skate park

Photos: Louise Knight



📷 ABOVE: Then president of the Rotary Club of Marton Andrew Shand, left, council youth adviser Nardia Gower, and council parks team leader Athol Sanson prior to the opening of Marton's new skate park.



Hundreds of people from throughout New Zealand converged on the small North Island town of Marton on May 25 for the opening of what is arguably the best rural skate park in the country.

What began as one young skater's dream has now become a reality, and the Rotary Club of Marton couldn't be prouder.

Following young Roman Strong's 150-signature petition to council requesting the local skate park be expanded and improved, the challenge was taken up by Marton locals Pania and Raymond Hemopo, who prepared a detailed and comprehensive report to support a rebuild of the skate park.

"It took me a year to write the proposal," Pania said. "It was 200 and something pages, including signatures – hundreds of signatures – and surveys from businesses, surveys from schools about what they wanted, quotes and everything I needed – before I took that to council.

"Nardia Gower, the strategic advisor for youth for the district council (who later joined the Rotary Club of Marton) was invaluable help in drafting the proposals."

The Hemopos approached the Rotary Club of Marton for help and, with the injection of Rotarian Andrew Shand's enthusiasm and practical approach, the project

took off. Nearly \$300,000 was raised by Rotary in a very short time and the Rangitikei District Council agreed to fund the repair of the existing skate park.

International skate park designers Rich Landscapes worked closely with locals on the design specs of the development.

"We designed the place according to what the local kids wanted," designer Richard Smith said.

The park now includes a flyout, box jump, vertical wall and flow bowl, with barbecues, seating, shade and play equipment planned for the near future.

The broad support of the community was reflected at the official opening event, with 250 scooter, skater and BMX riders present. Pania and Ray's son, V'Chay, was the first to ride the course. A scooter competition was also held, with riders coming from Canterbury, Marlborough, Wellington, Wairarapa, Hawkes Bay, Auckland and Manawatu to compete with many locals.

This project is a great example of a Rotary club working with locals, businesses, the district council and community groups to make a seemingly impossible dream come true. It is a great asset for the community that will serve generations to come.

To see videos of the opening and riders in action, along with future developments, follow and like the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/centennialdevelopment

