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Get these kids rolling again. Their BMX park, a refuge from temptation, burned down, and they need your help

By MIKE STROBEL

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Good thing the chief awakes to take a whiz or the whole shebang goes up for sure.

His washroom window at firehall 345 happens to overlook the BMX bike park across Dufferin St.

The station chief glances out and sees the inferno.

His men on "A" shift rush over to save many of the ramps and jumps.

Still, what a shame.

The BMX park is a refuge from evil temptations, tucked behind Wallace Emerson Community Centre, on the corner of Dupont St.

For two years, it has kept young daredevils out of mischief in this roughhewn 'hood.

I first strode the plywood decks last July with Michael Flaxman, the reformed Bicycle Bandit who owns a nearby bar called Boo Radley's.

Michael was giving a speech to the BMX kids, telling them not to do what he did, namely be a junkie and rob 30-some banks.

I wish the Wallace Boys had listened in.

That is the informal name for the ne'er-do-wells who settled the community centre grounds long before the BMX kids arrived.

"This is our park," one of them once said, drunkenly, before taking a swing at a kid.

A few bike-jackings have been attempted.

The Wallace Boys, mostly grown men, smoke joints in the lee of jumps.

There are even reports of them demanding younger BMX kids pay a "toll".

Suspicion for the fire falls heavily on the Wallace Boys, though there is no proof.

"We're all heartbroken," BMXer Ibri "Seabreeze" Beh, 18, tells me yesterday, at what's left of the ramps.

"This is my second home."

Seabreeze hops on his bike and reels off a 360 to fakie and tail-whip on the half-pipe, with air.

You had to be there.

We've come a long way from the wheelies of my boyhood.

You can still smell the fire, though it happened late on Good Friday.

Sadly, the charred remains include three of the corner ramps, which are tricky to build.

Total repair estimate is \$6,000.

'REALLY SUCKS'

Local ace Ian "Firebush" Christison, 16, a redhead, sums it up:

"This really sucks," he tells me.

"People wonder why kids get into gangs and all that trouble. It's because they don't have a place like this."

Some fine art is lost, too.

Viviana Astudillo, 18, painted a leopard that fairly leaped from a corner ramp.

She presented a print of it to the governor-general in Ottawa when she won an award for community service last October.

Now, the original is cinder.

They tell me Viviana cried when she saw.

"I worked hard on that," she says, simply.

The life-size leopard, stretched on a tree branch, was in keeping with the bike park's theme: "Peace."

Another work by Viviana, a haunting portrait of Marilyn Monroe, survives on the half-pipe.

She says she's happy to paint another leopard when the park is rebuilt.

Which brings us to some folks who can help do just that.

There's Mike Heaton, a former teacher who built most of the park on his own dime and his own time.

He is revered by those kids.

And Const. Scott Mills, of Crime Stoppers, one of the most tireless cops I know, who tells me: "That bike park is all good. It gives kids a chance to hang out in a cool community vibe."

And local businessmen like the Bicycle Bandit (Ret.), who plans a fundraiser, maybe a barbecue on the patio of his bar.

There's no shortage of volunteers. The riders will bring their tools and elbow grease, says Mike "Brakes" Battiston, 21, a Ryerson engineering student.

Then there's you.

Mills and Heaton, with volunteers at Humber College, have set up a trust fund to repair the park.

Donate at any TD Canada Trust, transit 1304, account 6350692. Refer to BMX Bike Park Fire Damage Rebuilding Fund.

Do this, and I'll pop a wheelie in your honour.

Mike Strobel's column runs Wednesday to Friday, and Sunday.