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# Redeveloped Rash Field Park at Baltimore Inner Harbor opens this weekend

By **LORRAINE MIRABELLA**  
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Children scaled rope ladders at a transformed Rash Field Park on the south side of Baltimore's Inner Harbor to reach two, 30-foot-high wooden towers. They rolled down grassy hills and explored pathways winding through native Maryland gardens.

Near the playgrounds, a skateboard park drew people of all ages, veterans and novices alike, including the city's mayor.

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The \$16.8 million Rash Field renovation unveiled Friday was designed to breathe new life into the Inner Harbor as a gathering spot and outdoor destination for residents and visitors alike.

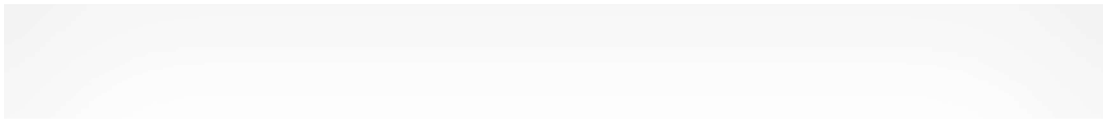
“This is what we can do when we dream big,” state Senate President Bill Ferguson, who represents the city, said during an opening event Friday. “This is a major downtown investment ... We must have a thriving, upbeat, energetic downtown in order to create a thriving city. Today’s investment here at Rash Field ... is everything that is good with this city.”

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The first phase of the public-private project, led by the Waterfront Partnership, was completed after nearly two years of construction. And it reached completion after years of planning to reshape harbor attractions as the downtown area has struggled with the loss of retailers and office tenants. The park had become outdated and failed to draw people as an attraction in its own right, officials have said.

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That is expected to change with new amenities and others still to come, officials said.



Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said creating high quality green space is “essential to ensuring that we develop physically, mentally and emotionally healthy communities, not just in Federal Hill but across Baltimore. The harbor is for all of Baltimore. Rash Field is for all of Baltimore.

“We know that it’s crucial, especially after what we all have been through after the past year, for us to get outside and enjoy the fresh air,” Scott said.

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Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott gets a skate lesson at the new Rash Field Park skate park from skateboarder Joey "Jett" Hornish. (Lorraine Mirabella)

Besides the skate park, a nature play area and an “adventure” playground, the 3.2-acre park along Key Highway features a beach area for volleyball, a fitness area and a field for sports leagues and other activities.

The BGE Pavilion, a glass structure with waterfront and skyline views and a steel shade awning, is expected to feature a cafe and outdoor seating by spring. An overlook with a green roof tops the pavilion. Benches are scattered along landscaped walkways, and signs inform visitors about Inner Harbor history, the park’s rain garden and local wildlife.

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The gardens include 125 newly planted shade and ornamental trees and MidAtlantic native shrubs that serve as habitat and pollinator sources for birds and

insects.

Funding for the project included \$10.5 million from the city, \$4 million from the state and another \$2 million from individuals, foundations and corporations, including \$1 million from BGE for the pavilion and nature play area.

Besides offering recreation, the park is designed for entertainment, education and environmental study.

On Friday, Locust Point resident Talley Kovacs watched her 7-year-old daughter balance on playground equipment while her 11-year-old son tried out the skatepark, hoping to pick up tips from more experienced riders.

“It’s stunning,” Kovacs said of the park redesign. “I am really impressed with how they incorporated all these spaces for multi-generational families and friends. I think it’s going to cause people who live here to spend a lot more time at the Inner Harbor.”

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A second phase of the park, which will expand it to seven acres, is in the fundraising and design stage. It will include walking and jogging paths, exercise equipment, a game lawn, and butterfly and bird gardens.

The Inner Harbor has hit hard times recently, with Harborplace, the centerpiece of downtown redevelopment in 1980, **currently in receivership and dealing with high vacancies.** At the indoor Gallery mall across Pratt Street from the pavilions, **retail tenants have been told they must vacate at the end of the year** as the owner reconsiders its plans for the building.

Asen Gyenyame, 19 of Baltimore, skateboards past a row of spectators at the new Jake's Skatepark at Rash Field.  
(Barbara Haddock Taylor)

Scott said Friday that people often tell him they remember how the harbor, when first redeveloped, was a place for gathering, festivals and families.

“It will be that way again,” Scott said, pledging that the city will continue to invest in the harbor. “This is the first portion of the reimagining and the rebuilding in the 21st century of what Baltimore’s Inner Harbor is going to look like.”

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Joe Fitzpatrick, a 32-year-old Hampden resident who has been skateboarding for two decades, recalled how he and friends who grew up in the city were relegated to taking their boards to downtown streets or the old Rash Field’s concrete pavilion, not designed for such activity.

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“This is phenomenal,” Fitzpatrick said of the new park. “This is a premier, 21st century skatepark in the middle of a major city. It’s pretty wild.”

Fitzpatrick is involved now with a nonprofit group that works to build skate parks in the city and offered input on the Rash Field park. Called Jake’s Skate Park, it was named after Jake Owen, a five-year-old South Baltimore boy who enjoyed skateboarding and other sports and was killed by a cell phone distracted driver in 2011.

“The features here are very approachable for beginners, for intermediate, for experts,” Fitzpatrick said. “Everything here is built to skate. It’s smooth. It’ll grind. Everything you want in a skate park.”

Skateboarder Joey “Jett” Hornish, who also helped design the park and raised \$35,000 at an art show for the project, offered Scott some skateboarding tips Friday. The mayor briefly glided, without mishap, along one of the park’s flatter surfaces.

Skateboarder Joey "Jett" Hornish prepares to jump over Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, seated in the new skate park at redeveloped Rash Field Park. (Lorraine Mirabella)

Before that short lesson, Hornish demonstrated a jump off a ramp, flying directly over Scott’s head as

the mayor sat in the bowl posing for photos. Hornish completed the jump and landed smoothly.

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