

Bikers celebrate opening

By Cassidy Olivier

After years of planning and a weekend of frenzied work, Merritt's mountain bike park officially opened on Saturday to the delight of local bike enthusiasts and adrenaline junkies.

Mayor Laird was joined by Rotary representatives and contributing businesses at the noon-time ribbon cutting, marking the culmination of a community-wide effort.

"This looks like it is going to be good for the city," Laird said as the ribbon fell to the ground.

Park designer Jay Hoots of North Vancouver was also on hand, offering skills and maintenance lessons to local riders of all ages who wasted no time fulfilling the Mayor's prediction.

"I didn't think it would come to fruition," Hoots said while surveying the park. "I can't believe it was built the

way it was — it is a pure testament to the level of commitment of the community."

Hoots helped design and build the park after being contacted by MSS teacher and bike enthusiast Darren Coates.

Now that the park has been officially opened, Hoots said it is important to maintain the tracks to ensure their longevity and reduce the risk of injuries.

This is expected to fall on the youth of the community who are already making full use of the park.

"The whole idea was to involve youth from the get go," Coates said. "They have a vested interest in maintaining the quality of the jumps and the track, and they are all super pumped on doing it."

Marking the opening of the park was the instalment of a water hose and a toolbox that will be used to shape, repair and maintain

the track as it suffers wear from frequent use and exposure. The jumps will need watering at least twice a week.

So far, Merritt's youth have stepped up to the plate.

"I was just there until eight tonight, and I've been there every night since we got water," 17-year-old Braiden Anderson said two days after the opening.

Anderson, a Grade 11 student and mountain bike whizz, is one of the unofficial youth leaders who has been entrusted with the job of maintaining the park and establishing the rules of use. Already, he has set up a weekly Thursday night meeting with the local riders for track maintenance.

He said it's crucial to get younger riders involved.

"Once the younger generation gets on they will continue to maintain the course once us older guys have left,"



Representatives from Rotary, the mountain bike park and the City of Merritt gather for the official ribbon cutting. (Below) (Left) Braiden Anderson and (right) Jay Hoots enjoy the park.

he said. "It is basically kids teaching kids."

Meanwhile, Anderson is looking ahead on ways to create an even better vibe in the park by encouraging riders to progress and get better together.

One way he is looking into doing this is through a weekly jam session, with a small prize up for grabs to the rider, regardless of skill level, who had ridden the hardest that day.

"That way it would be about progression and who is trying the hardest," he said.



Photos by Cassidy Olivier