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Skate event in Irving caters to amputees, others with disabilities

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When he was just 4 years old, Jon Comer of Garland got hit by a car while riding his bicycle. After about three years of surgeries, he lost his right foot. But then, he said, he was free.

He didn't let a prosthetic foot prevent him from pursuing his passion.

"I was so anxious to get moving," said the 37-year-old professional skateboarder.

"I don't think there were any big obstacles for me to overcome," Comer said. "There's just been a lot of small things along the way."

Comer will take part in Irving-based RISE Adaptive Sports' "They Will Skate Again-Texas" event Saturday at Lively Skate Park in Irving. The nonprofit offers free athletic programs year round for people with physical challenges.

Life Rolls On returns to the second annual Irving event from California. A subsidiary of the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, Life Rolls On initially offered only adaptive surfing events. The nonprofit now includes adaptive skating and snowboarding.

Chris Goad, executive director of RISE, credits Life Rolls On with helping him face his fears about the ocean. He dived into a wave and fractured his neck at 17, then later surfed with the organization's help.

"The thrill of riding a wave to the shore was just exhilarating," Goad said.

After working in the business world for many years, he decided to try to nonprofit work. Volunteering at Baylor Rehabilitation in Dallas led him to RISE.

"It was a watershed moment for me," Goad said about meeting Paul Gray, founder and board chairman of RISE. "I volunteered for them, joined the board, and now work for them."

Gray started the nonprofit in 2007. He's been grateful for the support of Irving, which offers Georgia Farrow Recreation Center for quad rugby, indoor soccer and power soccer; Senter Park Center for quad rugby tournaments; and Campion Trails for handcycling.

"Ray Cerda and [city manager] Tommy Gonzalez have been great," Gray said.

Cerda, director of Irving Parks and Recreation, became a quadriplegic after being thrown from a truck in high school. Like many of those served by RISE, he doesn't let a disability slow him down.

Joe Moses, Irving's recreation manager, opened Georgia Farrow to the quad rugby group, which meets every Friday night at no charge.

"It's been great meeting Paul and just a thrill to see what he does," Moses said.

Gray has also snagged the support of several companies to sponsor the skate event.

Christiaan Bailey of California is a featured guest at the Irving event. Injured in 2006 at his favorite skate park, Bailey serves as an ambassador for Life Rolls On.

Trained volunteers will assist disabled skaters as they navigate the curves and hills of the park. The event is for all ages and will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Lively Skate Park is at 909 N. O'Connor Road, behind the Lively Pointe Youth Center. Visit riseadaptivesports.org.

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