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Kids not bored working with boards

By Kelly Strodl
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Mike McCardle sanded down the edge of an unfinished skateboard deck, taking a break every so often to push the sandy blond curls out of his face without getting too much sawdust on the rest of him.

This would not be the first board that Mike, 9, of Costa Mesa, ever owned, but his dad Russell McCardle, was sure it would be the one he will care for the most.

“Kids take things like this for granted,” McCardle said. “Skateboards don’t just happen. I think once he’s on it he will have much more appreciation for it.”

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Brian Hanhart, of createaskate.org, right, shows Ian, 9, the proper way to sand a skateboard at the 6th annual Festival of Children at South Coast Plaza on Sunday.

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It seemed dad was correct, from the determination in Mike's face as he smoothed out the rail lines of his soon-to-be new board.

"I couldn't imagine doing this every day," Mike said.

Mike was just one of many kids gaining a new understanding of what really goes into the boards they see neatly packaged and assembled in stores, at the *CreateAskate.org* program during the Festival of Children held this weekend in South Coast Plaza.

Between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Sunday, scores of children like Mike were shown the entire process of skateboard construction — from tree to clear coating — at the workshop taught by skateboard legend Paul "Professor" Schmitt.

Schmitt has met with enormous praise at local Newport-Mesa Unified schools, where last year he used fifth- and sixth-graders as his guinea pigs for the program.

There are already plans to bring the program back next year, Schmitt said.

Schmitt and his long-time "No. 2" Brian Hanhart began developing the program about two years ago, and only recently brought the idea public in presentations at a handful of schools, including some in Schmitt's hometown of Tampa Bay, Fla.

"It's so great for the kids; skating has become so prevalent in our culture," Hanhart said.

First step to getting a board is choosing the correct wood for stability, Schmitt told his first students Sunday morning.

"Take seven layers of hard maple wood with grain going five long and two



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across,” Schmitt said, adding that having more pieces where the grain goes the length of the board keeps it from breaking. “Most people can’t believe how strong it is once the boards are pressed together.”

After teaching the group about the difference between a hard wood and a soft wood (botanically hardwood has leaves and softwood has needles), Schmitt measured each kid and gave them a blank deck relative to their height.

Although they followed a number of the same steps as in the schools Sunday, the entire process was simplified due to location and time constraints at the festival.

Boards already pre-pressed and shaped were sanded by the kids with the perfect curve and prepped for the next step — decoration.

“I knew we were going to have to sand it and knew my arm was going to get tired, but that was OK,” Mike said. “Once I take a rest it gets better, and I get back at it.”

Boards were given a personal touch as the novice builders drew pictures and applied stickers to the base of the boards.

Once that was complete, the final step of clear-coating and drying the boards took less than 10 minutes to complete.

“It becomes a really neat learning experience, Schmitt said. “It’s empowering and teaching kids that they can do anything.”

“A lot of these kids don’t know how to skate really well,” Hanhart said. “I mean, you can look at their shoes and tell right off the bat if they skate.”

The Beachworks shop down the walkway from the event saw a tiny boom in sales as more than 10 of the children with new decks came in to purchase entire truck, wheel and bearing sets to make the boards rideable.

For more information check out www.createAskate.org.

The website follows the production of a skateboard from the very tree each deck is cut from until the students slap their own designs on the base.

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