



Emma Bross skates one of the homemade ramps at the Board Meeting session.



Board Meeting cofounders (left to right) Elyse "Stubbzy" Zwickelmaier and Shelby Giertz in the North KC parking lot where they hosted the session.

SKATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

"BOARD MEETING" IS BRINGING TOGETHER ROLLER FOLX YOUNG AND OLD
WORDS BY EMILY COX. PHOTOS BY CHASE CASTOR.

The skate park at dawn. It's quiet, the air is cool, and there aren't any dudes around to gawk, hassle, or intimidate. That's how Elyse Zwickelmaier, aka Stubbz, started skating.

"When I started skating," says Stubbz, "I was one of maybe three girls that actively skated around Kansas City. I was very alone, and honestly for the first year and a half that I skated, I would wake up at like 6:30 in the morning, and I would go to the skate park, and I would skate there because I knew I would be the only person there."

She convinced her best friend, Shelby Giertz, to start skating too. And, Stubbz says, "we've been shredding together ever since." Together they've formed Board Meeting, a skate collective for women and queer skaters to get together, skate, learn from and support one another.

As a new skater, Stubbz says, "I was motivated, so I learned stuff, but it was a really isolating and weird thing. I would try to be a part of the skate community. They'd have video premieres at the local shop, I'd always make a point to support it, because I am hyped on them. But I would be the only girl there. And after awhile, I was like, I don't want to be the only girl here!"

They formed Board Meeting to build up a community.



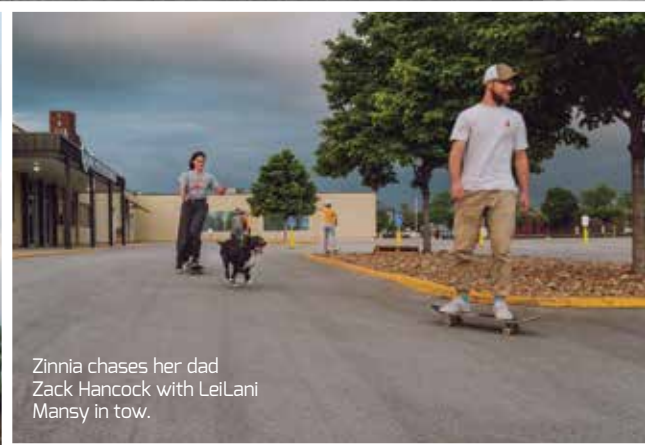
Paul Fish skates one of the homemade ramps at the Board Meeting session.



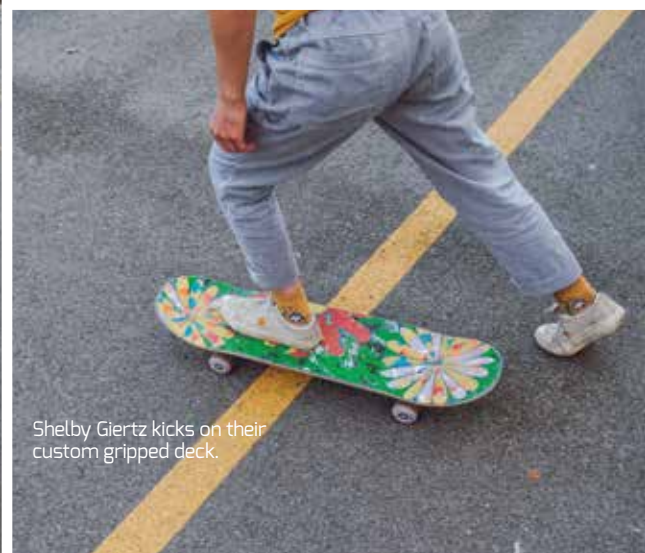
Park benches got nothin' on these skaters.



Elyse Zwickelmaier and Nikki Videmschek haul out a homemade ramp to spice up the session.



Zinnia chases her dad Zack Hancock with Leilani Mansy in tow.



Shelby Giertz kicks on their custom gripped deck.

“We saw this gap and this need of a support system and a way to hold each other accountable,” says Giertz. “It can be really intimidating to get into a male-dominated sport, as a woman or as a queer person or just as a beginner. Having people around who are really excited, and at all different abilities and all different levels, it just brings the stoke.”

Both Stubbz and Giertz were clear that it’s not necessarily about the individual behavior of men at skate parks that makes it feel unwelcoming. “There’s not a lot of ill-intentioned male skaters,” says Stubbz. Being the only woman in any setting, living in the patriarchy that we do, can be a little nerve-wracking.

“Honestly sometimes it’s your own internal fear that’s more overwhelming than what’s actually going on at the park,” says Giertz. “Skateboarding is so hard. Being a woman or being a queer person and walking up to a skate park and it just being eight dudes fucking ripping...you know, just balls to the wall, going so hard, and you’re like, man I’m just here to like push around. Or as a woman you’re trying to carve a space for yourself at the park where there’s dudes who aren’t necessarily looking out for you or even expecting you to be there.”

“It’s much easier rolling up to a park,”

says Giertz, “when you’re with five other women or five other people who are your friends who support you.”

Of course, there’s still some men who could check their behavior. “There’ll be dudes that come up to me and try to like tell me how to do things and try to ‘help me,’” says Giertz, “and I’ve looked some of them dead in the eye and said, ‘Would you do this to a guy? A guy who was a beginner who was struggling, would you ever come over and offer the same assistance?’ Just straight up. I’m not trying to be a dick, I’m not trying to be rude. Just legitimately to have them realize their own behavior. Just treat me like everyone else. I’m here to be stoked about skateboarding, just like you.”

Note to skater bros, and bros in any male-dominated sport who encounter a woman giving it a shot: Don’t give unsolicited advice, don’t assume they know less than you, and don’t treat them like a unicorn. It also would help if you didn’t talk about your dick all the time.

“I heard a guy the other day [at the skate park,]” says Giertz, “one of his friends did a trick, and he was like, ‘Big dick!’ I was like, what...I don’t understand how the size of your anatomy correlates to your ability to stand on something with wheels and flip around. It doesn’t make sense. I just want to

break all of that, all of that should be gone.”

There are better ways to celebrate. Giertz continues, “One of the girls who skates with us, I love the way she supports people; her language about skating is so beautiful. When someone does something really gnarly, she says ‘You are so brave, that was

THERE’S NO WAY AROUND IT, YOU JUST LOOK LIKE AN IDIOT TRYING TO LEARN, AND SO IT TAKES A LOT OF CONFIDENCE AND HYPING YOURSELF UP, AND GETTING HYPED UP AND SUPPORTED BY OTHER PEOPLE TO REALLY MAKE YOU A GREAT SKATER

really brave.’ It’s beautiful. Skateboarding doesn’t have to be this toxic masculine, weird energy.”

When Stubbz and Giertz formed Board Meeting in January, they weren’t sure how many people would show up. They had been involved in organizing the annual Girls’ Skate Day at Harrison Street DIY, which regularly drew 50-100 women, many of whom

were new learners. With that level of interest, they knew this should be more than just a once-a-year thing. And they were right. Twenty folks showed up to their first event in January, only half of whom they knew personally.

Board Meeting launched not with a skate session, but with a video screening at Escapist, the oldest skate shop in town. Stubbz curated a 30 min selection of clips of women and queer folks skating from the 1960s to present. “There is this real misconception for people that women have not been involved in skateboarding at all, until maybe like the 90s,” says Stubbz. “That is totally not true. They’ve been there from the beginning.”

Rooting the launch of the collective in this history was intentional. “When you’re starting out skateboarding, you can really feel like you’re alone in it. With it being such a male-dominated sport, it can feel like women and queer people don’t have that



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space, or haven't contributed, but either way, it's not true. We should feel confident and feel that we have a right to this community as much as anybody else."

They've had steady turnout at skate sessions since then, though after a pandemic hiatus, they're now sticking to more frequent, but smaller sessions announced the day of, to make sure groups don't get too large for social distancing.

Before the pandemic, Board Meeting was selected for Art in the Loop, with a plan to build a small skate park downtown. However, Art in the Loop has hit pause on that and other public art projects in light of the ongoing pandemic. Even if it doesn't happen this year, "It's just cool to know that we are supported, that people believe in what we're doing," says Giertz.

Creating broader community connections is a big goal for Board Meeting. Stubbz says, "We want to create long and significant ties with local institutions such as local skate shops and skate parks and make sure that these institutions are, not only being like, 'oh yea you can come and skate,' but actively being excited about females and queer people and skateboarding, actively promoting that."

One way skate shops could show support is by hosting an event with a pro skater who is a woman. "That's something that

skate shops control," says Stubbz, "They basically will reach out to different teams, like 'Hey, people want you out here,' and they'll come out. And there's never been a pro female skater that's come to Kansas City. I think that would be so unbelievable for people to actually see that. We have women in our community who totally rip, who skate very, very well, but to see someone whose on that pro level, that would be really amazing."

Having a visible role model is a game changer for up and comers. While an event with a pro skater who is a woman would be inspiring to skaters of all stripes, Stubbz and Giertz themselves may be role models for young girls in the community, showing them that skating isn't just for the boys. Board Meeting can help change the culture so the sport is inclusive for kids from day one.

"A lot of boys have been skating since they were ten years old, they grow up learning how to skate," says Stubbz, "but girls are not encouraged to do that. But I think that's happening more often. There's this little girl who just turned seven; she comes to the skatepark all the time with her little brothers, and skates. It'll be so cool in another ten years to see them."

If you've always been curious about skating, but don't know how to get into it,

Board Meeting might be your spot. "We want people who have maybe never tried it before, never felt comfortable going to the skate park to come here and skate with us and feel more comfortable," says Stubbz.

"We are open to all skill levels," says Giertz. "We have girls doing kickflips and crazy wild amazing transition things who just freaking shred and we have people who it's their first day on a skateboard. But no matter what, everyone's just stoked to be there and really supportive."

The supportive, communal vibe at Board Meeting means skaters are able to help one another learn. "There's so many people with different abilities in our collective, so there's guaranteed someone there who knows how to do something you're working on," says Giertz. "With that comes people sharing information and sharing knowledge and us challenging one another and supporting one another. It just kind of happens at the sesh, when you see someone trying something and you're like, 'Hey you totally got that! Have you thought about trying this other trick? If you can do that, you can totally do this.'"

Ultimately, Board Meeting's got what you need: "There's no need for anyone to do anything other than skate with us because we have the support and the advice han-

dled," says Giertz.

"When you are skating with people you feel comfortable with," says Stubbz, "you push yourself more, and you become more confident through the vehicle of skateboarding." It's more than just learning tricks—they grow confidence and community that changes their whole life.

"[Skating] is so empowering," says Stubbz. "It's such a hard thing to do, even just learning how to push, and you just look so stupid learning how to do it, there's no way around it, you just look like an idiot trying to learn, and so it takes a lot of confidence and hyping yourself up, and getting hyped up and supported by other people to really make you a great skater."

A lot has changed since those early mornings skating by herself. "I know how lonely those beginning years were for me, and I just don't want other people to have to deal with that, because they shouldn't. I know firsthand how awful it can be. When I look at guy skaters I know, they're always skating with their friends, they've been doing that since they've been growing up, they always have that support, it's hard to push yourself on skateboarding when you're alone, you really need that community to push you. The only way it's going to grow is if we have community." **P**

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