



# SKATEBOARD PHILANTHROPY

WHEN NOT ON A BOARD, BENEVOLENT SKATERS DEVOTE THEIR TIME TO HELPING OTHERS. By Maxwell Douglas

AS SKATEBOARDING continues to gain momentum and grow into bigger business, it's only natural that alongside the rising paychecks, exposure, and consumerism would come a sect of benevolent souls looking to spread the goodwill of skateboarding to their fellow man. Generous skateboarders have created organizations that help underprivileged and inner-city youth by providing scholarship funds, helping to save legendary skateboard spots, and fostering local skateboard

or have access to parks. One leader in this area is Ari Gold, founder of the Doogood Conservatory (doogood.org). Doogood's philanthropic mission is to give kids access to skateboarding. Gold, a former snowboard shop owner in Lake Tahoe, sacrificed his own business and means of income, to move to San Diego and create an organization that would eventually reach thousands of skateboard-less children nationwide. With product support from Blitz, Giant, NHS, and Girl, Doogood provides free

e-mails, is infectious. He is emphatic about the need for someone to step in and create the bridge between children and success. "Skateboarding is an enriching experience," says Gold. "It is immediate. It satiates frustration. It helps society by tiring out mischievous youth so eager to put their body on the line. It helps prevent child obesity. It saves lives."

## ELEMENTALLY AWARE

Taking a more primal approach, Elemental Awareness carries a well-deserved familiar ring, as it is the goodwill-skateboarding program affiliated with Element skateboards. Elemental Awareness' unique blend of skateboarding instruction, wilderness survival training, and artistic expression, is the brainchild of Mike Kershnar and Todd Larson, who created the successful wildlife-skills segment of the annual YMCA skateboard camp in Visalia, California. Kershnar and Larson approached Element President Johnny Schillereff with the idea for the program, and it soon became a year-round operation and presently has a full-time staff of three. Since it bares the name, Element has continued to be the primary source of funding for the project in terms of office space, supplies, and moral support. A board was even released to the public with sales royalties going directly to Elemental Awareness. A sub-line of Element clothing is expected to be released soon with the same intent.

Elemental Awareness sponsors numerous events in the western United

to experience the day-to-day operations. Success stories abound, claims Kershnar, as he describes a recent experience in the woods in Arizona where a homesick 10-year-old named Mark emerged from his tears, and in the span of one week,



The Elemental Awareness staff poses with a recent contest winner.

learned how to ollie, make a campfire from a bow, and gained an abundance of self confidence, all thanks to the efforts of Elemental Awareness.

Underlying their efforts is the slogan, "from a kickflip to a campfire," and a belief that the world truly can be transformed into a better place if people exercise their passions. It's that same philosophy that has inspired Kershnar and Larson to instill a little hope into the hearts of hundreds and thousands of kids.

The future is shaping up nicely for Elemental Awareness, with events continuously being planned domestically and soon expanding to the international skateboard world. The ultimate objective is noble, if not perhaps naive,

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS ARE ESTABLISHED AND MAINTAINED BY GRACIOUS, HARD-WORKING INDIVIDUALS, BUT THEIR SUCCESS WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT STRONG FINANCIAL SUPPORT.

States, mostly involving contests for inner-city kids who would not have access to them otherwise. Entry is always free, and each participant walks away a winner. While everyone gets a free prize, the grand-prize winner is granted a trip to the YMCA skate camp in Visalia. Wedged between a thick contest schedule are inspirational walk-through visits of companies such as Element and board manufacturer P.S. Stix, where kids get

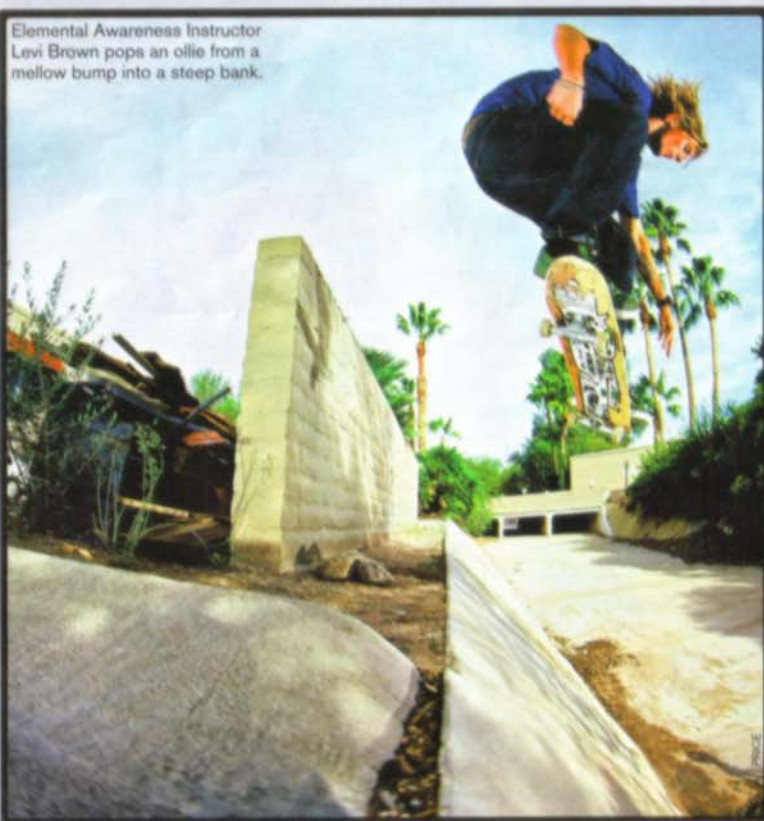
but Kershnar says, "The overall goal is to someday have every skater in the world have a positive experience at an Elemental Awareness event in their youth, and to take that positive experience and have it ripple outward into the world."

## SKATING TO SCHOOL

Should the participants in Elemental Awareness stick with skateboarding, and point their lives in a prosperous direction

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Elemental Awareness Instructor Levi Brown pops an ollie from a mellow bump into a steep bank.



communities. No matter their method, the aim remains the same—embody the concept of "skateboarding ambassadorship" in all of their work.

## DOING GOOD

With skateboarding invariably tied to impressionable youth, the first and most obvious place to spread the greatness is with children that would otherwise not be able to afford equipment

skateboards to 15 parks throughout the United States. The boards are free for park participants to use, and are replaced with new completes every four months. The old boards are then distributed to inner-city kids, who in Gold's own words, "simply can't afford a 100-dollar toy."

Doogood also spends a great deal of time distributing boards to underprivileged kids during the holiday season. Gold's enthusiasm, even in