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Familial skateboarding adventures occur weekly within the Danza family as Aidan [from left], Barbara, Matt and Erin coordinate ABF Skatetrips to different skateparks.

# Danza gets back on the grind

**“Skateboarding is all about looking at a landscape and figuring out how you’re going to perform skateboarding tricks on it.”**

MATT DANZA Point Pleasant

BY BRIAN HARRIS  
STAR NEWS GROUP

For most people, just the act of riding a skateboard akin to performing with Cirque de Soleil — something only the most acrobatic of people can do. Once you add tricks like popshove-its, kickflips and 50-50 grinds, skateboarding moves well beyond casual recreation.

For 40-year-old Matt Danza of Point Pleasant, skateboarding has been a lifelong passion. He first picked up skating in 1988 at the age of 14 in North Brunswick, where his mother owned a flower shop. After watching some kids in his neighborhood skating, he got hooked enough so that he wanted to start his own skateshop.

“I would spend my days after school at the flower shop every day and when I got into skateboarding, I had the idea of ‘Maybe we can sell boards out of the front of the flower shop,’” Mr. Danza said.

With this idea in mind, he asked his mother Mary one day if he could sell skateboards out of the front of her American Beauty Flowers shop.

“I asked my mother if this is something that we could do, and you know most mothers would say no. But my mom’s the coolest mom in the world — she actually said yes,” Mr. Danza said.

With his mom’s approval, Mr. Danza set up what he called ABF Skate Shop, borrowing the initials of his mom’s flower shop. For the next decade, the ABF Skate

Shop was a thriving business, for two reasons according to Mr. Danza.

“The first thing was a pro skater named Tom Groholski, who lived two blocks behind the flower shop [with his family] and they had a big halfpipe in their yard and they would open the halfpipe to people and kids who wanted to skate it once or twice a week and people would skate on that ramp and then skate down a couple of blocks to visit our shop. And that was pretty official back in 1988,” Mr. Danza said.

“The other was that the Kendall Park roller rink opened up to skateboards once a week and right from the beginning, we talked to the owner and he allowed us to sell skateboards there once a week at the skate jam, and that was a great coincidence that propelled our skateshop from a kind of hokey little ‘skateboards in a flower shop’ to a really popular and really dominant business back in 1988.”

Mr. Danza’s mom took over the reins of ABF Skateshop when he went off to Virginia Tech in 1993 to study engineering until her retirement in 1998.

“My mother was ready to retire and move on to do other things and I just graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in engineering and I was ready to start an engineering career and that’s what I did,” Mr. Danza said.

Since the shuttering of ABF and ABF Skate Shop in 1998, life took a different course for Mr. Danza. He got his engineering degree from Virginia Tech, met his wife Barbara,



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After years of neglecting a favorite past time, Mr. Danza has returned to skateboarding, even introducing his passion to his family.

had two children; Aidan, 9 and Erin, 7. He started working for the family business, John Maltese Iron Works, as a structural engineer and settled down in Point Pleasant.

Around his 40th birthday in June of last year, Mr. Danza started to go through what he calls a “mid-lifey thing.”

“I just turned 40, I was a little overweight, a little bit out of shape and my children are a little bit older now, at nine-years-old and seven-years-old. And I felt like I wanted to get active again and do things again... So the thing that really interested me was skateboarding,” Mr. Danza said.

With his son Aidan, Mr. Danza got back on the board, first hitting up Seven Presidents Skateplex in Long Branch then going to other skate parks all over the area, which was a rejuvenation of sorts for Mr. Danza.

“It put me in better shape, it put me a better mindset

just for having fun with my family.”

With the seeds of a renewed interest in skateboarding planted in the Danza family, Mr. Danza was also feeling some regret for walking away from a successful skate shop when he went off to college.

“The act of taking up skateboarding again quite naturally reminded me of the good old days of the shop,” he said.

With that in mind, Mr. Danza set up a Facebook page so old customers could post photos and stories and reminisce about the ABF Skateshop.

“The social media of today it made it possible for me to reconnect with hundreds of old customers, which I’ve been doing over the course of the last five years,” Mr. Danza said.

It all led Mr. and Mrs. Danza to discuss bringing ABF Skate Shop back, but in a different form than its previous incarnation. They decided to rebrand ABF Skateshop with the new concept of “family skateboarding adventures.”

They wanted to create a new brand that would encourage families to go out and be active together.

“If you take a look at your Facebook feeds or your social media feed, people aren’t really sharing what they own, they’re sharing what they’re doing, whether it’s going to a gym or riding a skateboard or learning art or something,” Mr. Danza said.

“I want ABF to be about helping the doing of skateboarding or the adventure of skateboarding, not so much the buying of paraphernalia or equipment, but more so helping to actually do the activity... I’d like to serve the young kids who are just starting out and getting into it and the parents, who might be curious and help them to see the benefits it.”

He has begun coordinating what he calls “ABF Skatetrips” to different skateparks. The first was to Second Nature Skatepark in Peekskill, New York on Jan 3, with 35 people, and most recently “Penn Skate” in Allentown, Pennsylvania on Feb 28.

[For information on future ABF Skate Shop trips go to their website, [www.abf-skateshop.com](http://www.abf-skateshop.com).]

ABF has also begun selling “steel flatbar rail sliders” which Mr. Danza makes. They are flat bars that can be stored in a garage and brought out to the driveway or the street so that the entire family can get a session in without having to go to a skate park or skate spot. The bars are currently available for purchase on ABF’s website and in certain local skate shops.

“First, I’m encouraging children to skateboard, both boys and girls, and I’m also encouraging the dad to get back on the board or join his son skateboarding if he never did it before because that’s better than sitting outside the park and the fence,” he said. “You’re not too old, you’re not too out of shape... I’m encouraging not only the dads, but the moms to give it a try.”

Mr. Danza maintains that skateboarding also fosters creativity and thus gave him an advantage in his career as an engineer.

“Skateboarding is all about looking at a landscape and figuring out how you’re going to perform skateboarding tricks on it,” Mr. Danza said.

Compared to rules-oriented team sports, he said, skateboarding provides an open canvas, giving skaters, especially children, the freedom to flex their minds — goodtraining for “careers where you need to be able to think outside of the box.”

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