

The Early Development of Formalized Recreation

By Bill Alley

During the 1960s, until the middle of the 1970s there was an increasing belief that what an individual was involved in during their leisure was important to their person as well as the society they were a part of. Almost overnight, recreation programs in hospitals, municipalities, resorts and other agencies, which served the public, were constructed to meet these needs. These programs, in order to provide maximum service, needed to be constructed and conducted by individuals with knowledge and skills in recreation programming, leadership and budgeting.

Institutions of higher education quickly responded to this need as literally hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the country implemented academic programs for those students interested in developing these skills. The state of Iowa was no exception as academic programs were developed at the University of Iowa, Iowa State University, Drake University, a number of four-year colleges, Iowa Lakes Community College and Des Moines Area Community College.

For the next two decades, available employment positions for the college graduate with an associate degree or bachelor's degree in recreation flourished.

Recreational Leadership Programs at DMACC

In June of 1974, I was contacted by representatives of DMACC and asked if I would be interested in the construction and implementation of a recreation education program, followed by the teaching of such. Since all facets of recreational services were in the embryo stage and expanding, I enthusiastically accepted the assignment.

An advisory committee was selected consisting of representatives from the academic recreation programs at the University of Iowa, Iowa State University and the University of Northern Iowa. Also selected were employees in municipal and therapeutic recreation programs throughout the state.

The committee's mission was to design an academic program which would

- Provide the student with the skills necessary to construct and conduct recreation programs in a variety of settings, and
- Allow all courses to transfer toward a bachelor's degree at a four-year university.

The committee completed this task in the highest of order.

For the following two decades, upon graduation, the student who wanted a job was able to find one, and the student who wanted further education was able to apply all the earned credits toward a four-year degree at a college or university.

Changes in Recreation from the 1980s until the Present

During the middle of the 1980s and 1990s, society's view of recreation changed from recreation as a personal need to recreation as "fun and games", which still exists today. This change came in conjunction with money shortfalls for most municipalities, businesses and academic institutions. The result was disastrous for the recreation profession as thousands of those employed in recreational services lost their jobs. In addition to the elimination of recreation programs throughout the country, many if not most colleges and universities eliminated their recreation education programs. For example, in the state of Iowa, none of the programs listed earlier exist today as there are no post-high school recreation education programs currently offered in the state of Iowa.

The Recreational Leadership Program at the Des Moines Area Community College was officially discontinued during the year 2000.

On a more personal note

Ironically, in 1972 my father, who was serving as the President of the Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, was the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Iowa Parks and Recreation Association. The topic of his presentation was "Recreation in the year 2000." His basic thesis was that professionals in the field of Parks and Recreation must become involved in research in order to develop a true long lasting profession, which consists of supportive, valid and reliable data. The last line of his speech was this: "If you fail to do such – not even the Red Cross can help you." Many in the audience were irritated and offended, however, sometimes the truth hurts – He was right!