

# OUR LEADERS SPEAK UP



CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ROY ELLIS, LLOYD MINSHALL,  
BOB SECORD, COR WESTLAND AND RAY WITTENBERG

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**I**N LATE 1991, 12 PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN leaders in the field of recreation in Canada were asked to contribute their thoughts on the following questions:

1. What is happening to recreation as a public sector program?
2. Where is the field going?
3. Where is the leadership coming from?
4. What are your views on opportunities and dangers?

Five of the 12 have contributed their thoughts for this issue. Each personal statement approaches the topic from a different perspective, reminding us to recall the roots of recreation, to consider a community development approach, to remember the volunteers, to understand the needs and capacities of the entire human organism, and to broaden our view of the potential of recreation.

Whatever the personal perspective, all of the following statements are optimistic.



**LLOYD MINSHALL**  
*What's Happening in  
Public Recreation*

I welcome the opportunity to make suggestions for examination of public recreation from the perspective of opportunity or crisis. As a recreationist, it is my belief we can make that choice!

And here are some of the issues within which those choices will be made:

- overall fitness and personal well-being; our relationship with the health-care system; prevention,

rather than cure;

- tension between individual rights and the needs of our communities; integration of the physically and socially deprived;
- citizen involvement; the role of volunteers in the programs of our public agencies and institutions;
- concern for our environment; the scarcity and overuse of publicly owned open space;
- illiteracy; public understanding of the values inherent in leisure; our commitment to life-long learning;
- unemployment and enforced free time; industry and work will become even more impersonal with less job satisfaction;
- a decrease in personal free time; verification and examination of how this has happened;
- economic pressures and their negative effect on one's social contacts; innovative approaches to improving interpersonal relationships;
- passive TV watching; *The Futurist* (September-October, 1991) says this is our top leisure activity, averaging 20 hours per week.

The list could go on!

To understand the rest of this response, it may be wise to comment, briefly, on my own background which, early in the "dirty thirties", included preparation for a teaching career. Later, in 1951, after sampling a variety of different occupations, I accepted my first full-time job in recreation. Then followed 27 years working for the Province of Ontario, two years as Commissioner of Parks and Recreation in the City of Kitchener and 11 years in retirement. Since the beginning of the '80s, I have completed a series of national seminars for CP/RA, published a profession-

al bulletin, *The Recreationist*, and served as a volunteer consultant on six recreation projects in Colombia, South America, and in Poland. That's six decades of recreation experience - half of it as a volunteer, most of it in public recreation.

The remaining comments are based on a quotation used by my local pastor on the Sunday between Christmas and the New Year - that we have little else to take us into the future but roots and wings - the strength of our beginnings and the wings of our expectations. Space limits me to one of my favourite topics - our roots. While the following information tends to be true for Canada, I'll deal with what happened in Ontario.

Organized public recreation made its appearance in the mid '40s. From there, it mushroomed! In 1945, 18 municipalities had passed an approved recreation by-law. One year later, this number had increased to 70. In 1949, there were 144 municipalities receiving provincial grants; three years later, there were 168. These Provincial grants to municipalities increased from \$10,000 in 1945 to \$250,000 in 1952.

The first full-time municipal recreation director was named by the City of Brantford in 1945. Three years later, there were 58 municipalities with full-time staff.

This amazing growth in public recreation was possible because of the involvement and dedication of community volunteers. At the beginning, municipal recreation committees were made up of five citizens and two councillors. Citizens did most of the work, within the limits of policy and the budget, and they made many of the decisions.

The intent of government, from the '40s to the early '60s, was to support and encourage community recreation. This approach tended to change in the late '60s and '70s. As public recreation budgets grew, it was quicker and easier to hire full-time staff to do the work, rather than find and train volunteers. By the '80s, my national research project, which was assisted by the University of Ottawa and CP/RA seminars, proved that most urban recreationists were content to be operators of facilities and programs. This complete reversal of role took place in three decades. Citizen dependency on government for services, once created, has been difficult to change.

The growth of recreation education has been less dramatic! The Physical Education Department of the University of Western Ontario (London) advertised an undergraduate degree program in recreation in 1954. It attracted few students and was discontinued two years later. This failure may have been caused by a three-year, in-service training program introduced by the provincial government in 1951. This provided on-the-job training for a career in municipal recreation. Study was encouraged and supported through correspondence and a one-week residential seminar in each year of the training. More than 350 graduated from the program during its first two cycles. The program was terminated in 1965.

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The first two-year diploma program was started by the province, at the Federated Colleges (Guelph) in 1963. This program was decentralized to seven community colleges, beginning four years later. Undergraduate degree programs were started at the Universities of Ottawa and Waterloo in 1968, 14 years after the first Canadian degree program was offered at the University of British Columbia. Once started, formal education programs in recreation grew.

Statistically, these provincial figures show how much slower that growth has been. In 1963 in Ontario, there were 34 recreation students and a full time faculty of one. That one digit represents me! Ten years later, there were 1390 students and 60 full-time faculty.

What have these statistics to do with our roots? They remind us of our

relatively short tenure and a remarkable, almost unbelievable, four decades of change and growth.

No, I am not suggesting we turn back the clock! But we should recall and rework:

- our dedication to recreation as a movement that has purpose, goals and objectives;
- our commitment to community development, voluntary action and continuing education;
- our application of innovation, consultation and facilitation skills.

Such action will help us to meet one of today's directives: produce more with less!

By honing and using some of the skills that served us so well in the past, the wings of our expectations for the future need know no bounds.



**ROY ELLIS  
A Saskatchewan Perspective**

Since 1940, the provincial government of Saskatchewan has provided leadership in the recreation field. That leadership has been the essential element which allowed the province to develop one of the most successful recreation movements in Canada.

Almost every major provincial/regional recreation association, society, agency, etc. owes its beginnings to the involvement of consultants from the provincial government's recreation arm. Also, with the exception of a few major centres, the provincial programs and services were primarily responsible for the establishment, growth, and development of municipal parks and recreation departments/boards from five in 1940 to 823 in 1987. This also includes the formation of 23 regional associations throughout the province.

During 1991, the provincial government decided to discontinue all recreation grants and severely cut consultant services. Municipalities, regional associations and other provincial recreation-serving agencies are now relegated to

being dependent on lottery dollars (SaskTrust) for financial aid and a decimated staff of field consultants to tackle a somewhat unattainable workload. The government now expects the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA), the Saskatchewan Recreation Society (SRS) and the Regional Associations to fill the gap - an impossible task under the present level of funding from the Trust.

Although the larger urban centres with professional staff are being forced to cut corners and sacrifice some programs, they have the resources to weather the difficult times. Almost all of these professionals are members of both the SPRA and SRS. These associations keep abreast of the latest trends and developments. They offer a series of conferences, seminars and workshops geared to the needs of their membership. These professionals, in turn, act as resource people in a variety of training programs offered throughout the province.

Although the major urban communities are in a better position to weather the difficult times, the smaller rural centres, which rely solely on volunteers, face a critical problem - how to manage and operate major facilities with very limited resources.

The survival instinct is part of the Saskatchewan psyche. Experiments with the district concept have been successfully conducted in the past - ie. two or more centres cooperate in the formation of a district recreation authority which is responsible for administration of recreation programming on behalf of the district residents. In most instances, these rural centres are approximately seven miles apart with a connecting blacktop highway. The cooperating parties must determine what facilities and programs will remain active and how a centralized plan, which utilizes the available district resources, will be implemented. I am hopeful that SPRA and the regional associations will promote this concept and provide the necessary workshops to expedite the program.

Throughout the past two years, SPRA and other agencies have conducted a study of rural volunteerism. The study will determine the most effective means of recruiting, training and managing volunteers who are critical to the survival of the recreation movement in rural Saskatchewan. Presently, pilot studies are being conducted in two rural communities to test the validity of the program.

Also, a centralized and expanded resource centre to serve the needs of the sport, culture and recreation communities, jointly sponsored by the three global agencies in SaskTrust and the Provincial Government, is being continued and upgraded.

The other side of the coin reveals that we continue to stray from the social responsibilities which have traditionally been part and parcel of the recreation scene. A charge that recreation is becoming a privilege reserved for the middle class has some basis in fact. The controversial "user pay" policy has caused us to disregard the legitimate needs of the disadvantaged. In many instances, simple play activi-

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ty for children is not considered a priority.

Youth continue to present a problem to many of our recreation agencies - how do we work with this extremely important segment of our society to the mutual benefit of both the individual and the community?

In spite of the tough times and the problems we face, there continues to be a great deal of harmony, cooperation and good will between sport, culture and recreation-serving agencies. This tradition has served us well in the past. That, along with the community commitment of our volunteers, will certainly help us resolve our present problems.



**BOB SECORD**  
*The Need to Take Stock*

Recreation people know me well enough to be sure that anything I write myself will never be short, so here are two statements which have been extracted from the recent Ontario study *Recreation: An Essential Service*. You have probably heard all about this through CP/RA, but one of the things that the study does provide is a challenge to the recreation practitioner, and it outlines the many benefits of recreation. In my opinion, these statements need to be analyzed, discussed and considered by every recreation practitioner.

It may be that we have become too complacent with our "in view" that recreation is somehow different from any other municipal or provincial service and should not come under the same scrutiny as other services because "we are here to save the world by providing fun, enjoyment, satisfaction and self-fulfilment through our efforts". As worthy as this view is, we are finding that in this recessionary period, with a more critical analysis by our decision makers and resources allocators, we must justify, as never before, what we do and how we do it. This should lead us to an evaluation of "are we doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, and at the right time?"

These two statements, by two senior decision makers involved in *Recreation: An Essential Service* focus groups, crystallize the view that we need to take stock now.

"Too many recreation practitioners are too narrow in their vision of recreation's potential. They intend to be almost exclusively concerned about accumulating and managing physical plants and conducting highly structured programs rather than appreciating the broader role recreation needs to fulfil in our changing society."

"Narrow views of recreation and parks are no longer supportable and many traditional approaches are not viewed as essential services. It is your potential to support and respond to community lifestyle and environment issues of the '90s that is well understood and respected."

My questions are:  
• Even if we do not perceive ourselves in this way, do others?

- If they do, what changes do we need to make to ensure recreation's relevance and importance to people and to the quality of community for the future?



### **COR WESTLAND** **Ours To Choose**

In the short run, let's say the next 10 to 15 years, I believe that we will see a continuation of the present trends towards financial conservatism - which will be translated into reduced budgets - "pay as you go" policies, privatization and program operation in partnership with

the private sector.

At the same time, and in part as a result of these, the "Recreation Profession" will begin to seriously question its reason for being, the essence of its role. We may well begin to ask ourselves if we are not on the wrong track; if, by our advanced programming, we have taken away a good deal of the private initiative upon which the entire recreation notion rests. The question of whether the adage of the *Eloa Prescription* still holds true - that the individual is his/her own best recreation resource - needs to now be placed at the centre of our agenda.

The consequence of the adage is that "Education for Leisure" and "Leisure Consultancy" may well have to become the centre pieces of recreation leadership training.

Another consequence of advanced "professionalization" is that we have chased the volunteer out of the door and, at best, turned him/her into a second class citizen. Especially with the continuing high levels of unemployment and the increasing number of older citizens, we could contribute considerably to the mental health of the nation by putting extra emphasis on volunteer recruitment, training and, especially, recognition (which should go beyond the traditional annual bean supper).

I see hopeful signs for the future. It is clear that the only way for Canada to compete in the global market is to automate its production processes. That means that our workforce will no longer be interchangeable and will need advanced training. It also means that the people who lost their job during the current recession will not get it back. As Toffler says in his latest book, *Powershift*:

"...any effective strategy for reducing joblessness in a super-symbolic economy must depend less on the allocation of wealth and more on the allocation of knowledge....We will need to prepare people, through schooling, apprenticeship and on-the-job learning, for work in such fields as the human services - helping to care, for example, for our fast growing population of the elderly, providing child care, health services, personal security, training services, leisure and recreation services, tourism and the like...we will have to begin according human service jobs the same respect previously reserved for manufacturing, rather than snidely denigrating the entire service sector as 'hamburger flipping'."

These are encouraging noises, as is the fact that recently, when the European Ministers responsible for programs for the disabled met in Paris, "Leisure and Recreation" appeared on the agenda for the first time in the history of these gatherings.

I see these as indications that recreation has begun its

move towards the centre of the world agenda; that people will increasingly begin to accept responsibility for their own leisure pursuits; that they will turn to the professionals for advice and guidance (but not for spoon feeding) and that they will demand high quality performance from the professionals.

I also believe that we will see a closer integration of all services: "holistic" approaches will no longer be interesting (but empty) slogans. I can see the development of "human services" departments, of which recreation is a vital part.

This means that we must educate professionals with a broad, service-oriented background - people with an understanding and appreciation of the needs and capacities of the entire human organism. We must aim at creating social scientists in the comprehensive sense of the word - the rebirth of the "homo universalis" of years gone by?



### **RAY WITTENBERG** **Flashing Red Signals in the Path**

The last decade and a half has witnessed a phenomenal increase in recreation resources. It has also seen a large number of recreation professionals transformed from recreationists to administrators - administrators who have become introverted "hawkers" of activities and promoters of large capital investments - administrators who have ignored adaptability as a means to remain relevant and have gone through "flashing red signals" which warned of problems ahead.

As a result, the events of the next decade will place all recreation services on a swaying tightrope. Any wrong move by those responsible for the delivery of service can lead to a crippling fall.

What does this say for the last decade?

- Rapid increases in resources prompted recreationists to become careless.
- Gradual increases in unemployment rates were ignored. (3% in the '50s, 6% in the '60s, 9% in the '80s to 10.6% in the '90s). The implications for recreation of "forced leisure" were not considered, nor were preparations made to meet the challenge.
- Recreation departments and agencies stopped being afraid of large capital investments. Large complexes were built. Operation and maintenance costs escalated.
- The "forté" of recreation departments changed - we became hawkers of activities rather than community developers, educators or partners in program development and implementation.
- In most cases, potential partnerships or cooperative working relationships with allied recreation, education and social agencies were negated rather than actively pursued or negotiated.
- A narrow view of recreation persisted. The popular notion that recreation is "fun and games" prevailed.
- Provincial fiscal resources (in many provinces) increased due to the dedication of lottery revenue for recreation.
- A negligible increase in fiscal support from tax-based revenue occurred.
- An increased number of provincial and regional organizations became largely dependent on government resources.

- Provincial grant guidelines and criteria became the norm for assistance to organizations, agencies and municipalities.
- Provincial staff became mainly grant assessors, donors and "watch dogs" rather than consultants, visionaries, simulators, initiators, needs assessors and trainers or developers of recreation leaders.
- Volunteer investment became dormant. Investment in the growth and development of volunteers locally, regionally and provincially dissipated.
- Regulated and traditional training became the norm rather than developmental and responsive to an evident or expressed need.
- In many cases, provincial and municipal recreation departments were reorganized, split up and transferred to departments of unrelated disciplines such as municipal affairs, finance, housing, public works, transportation, fire, etc.

What does this say for the future?

- An understanding and appreciation of the essence and importance of recreation must be acquired by most Canadians. Communication which uses professional recreation "jargon" is rarely understood by the average individual and must be avoided. Communication with simple, understandable English is the key.
- The existing, limited public constituency must expand into a large and well-informed public constituency. A large, supportive public constituency is desperately needed. Creating one should be a priority concern. Support for recreation in the future will depend on it.
- The public as a whole needs to see a larger view of recreation - a view that goes beyond recreation complexes, community centres and the recreation activities now being offered. People need to see the range of activities outside the agencies i.e., the family, the library, neighbourhood over-the-fence get-togethers, walks in the woods, etc.
- An obligatory requirement for the future is to manage to serve the largest of populations with recreation services and to fill in the determined gaps with less or without proportional resources.
- The heavy reliance on quantitative thinking, heretofore used for justification, must be tempered with qualitative thinking. Planning in a quantitative sense is a way and a means to operate in more places, with more money, more facilities and more staff. It accepts without fault the assumptions, methods and systems which have prevailed. It mistakes size for importance and confuses numerical growth with the existing impact on our society.
- Qualitative thinking, on the other hand, is concerned with using the facts and conditions at hand - with doing things differently, in a more useful and relevant way. It reexamines the mode of action by which it fulfils its

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purpose or evaluates need. It perceives recreation requirements as being based on real needs, is dependent on existing and predictable social conditions, and entails such things as flexibility, adaptability and invention.

- A thorough reinvestigation of our communities must take place. We must acknowledge how much we don't know. We must recognize how many of the existing community recreation programs are taken for granted with no solid base of qualitative evidence.
- Eliminate some old traditional programs. Instead, with community involvement, establish new and amended programs relevant to existing needs (not wants) in our communities.
- A reorganization of recreation services is required. Services over the last 15 years have grown like "topsy". There is a heavy cost for fragmentation and duplication

which occurs in so many agencies and organizations. A new way must be found for strong partnerships, cooperative and collaborative action to manage and make the most effective use of available resources - at all levels of delivery. Where do we go from here?

The rapid depletion of available fiscal resources, the prevailing recession, the foreboding future of a constant rate of unemployment, a great resistance to large expenditures, decreases in recreation budgets, demands for retrenchment, reduced staff and services - they force an intensive evaluation of the residue, and a determination of that residue's most effective use.

Public recreation has two paths it can take. One is to continue along the existing path built during an era

of increased resources. However, given the economic climate now and in the foreseeable future, this path may turn into a foundation of quicksand and force a retreat.

The other is to begin to renew the path upon which recreation was originally built and gradually strengthen its base with a solid foundation. Recreationists will take advantage of the existing legacy of resources to move forward with revitalized vision, inventive creativity, new partnerships and extensive community involvement in determination of its structure.

It is up to the recreation profession to know and choose which path to take.

**OPPORTUNITY OR DANGER? THE PATH CHOSEN WILL DETERMINE THE ANSWER.**

## THE AUTHORS

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