

History of BC Recreation and Parks / The Role of BCRPA



PARKS, CULTURE AND RECREATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



PREFACE

This oral history project was initiated by the Recreation Foundation of British Columbia (RFBC) with the impetus to share and celebrate the pivotal role of British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) in the growth and development of recreation in British Columbia (BC). This story is shared through oral histories that incorporate the lived experience of a small number of pioneers in the recreation and parks sector. This story highlights key milestones in the sector from interviews, BCRPA meeting minutes, website documents, archives compiled in the late 1970s and information compiled in a PhD thesis from 1979.

Cover Photo Source: Oak Bay Archives

BCRPA is an organization that was instrumental in bringing together small associations and commissions from every area of province in BC, including city recreation departments, and provincial and federal agencies and staff to form a unified front under the umbrella of recreation.

In the early 1900s, recreation was an unfamiliar community funded pastime without definition, while today it is deployed through highly integrated city and town services with budgets that match essential services like engineering and protective services.



<http://recreationfoundationbc.ca/oral-history-project/>

Since its founding in 1958, the majority of growth has occurred as the BCRPA revolutionized communications in the sector, facilitated and promoted professionalization, advocated for, coordinated, and channelled funding opportunities, and encouraged collaboration among sectors. It has been a champion for nature and the right to green and beautiful urban and rural space. It has been a catalyst in the development of communities connecting diverse service providers in complex networks, and has been a critical site for neighbours and members to meet and develop their political acumen. As recreation pioneer Kevin Pike affirmed, the BCRPA has been so influential that its name is virtually synonymous with recreation and parks.

Under the direction of an Oral History Project steering committee, including BCRPA Honorary Life Members—Ken Winslade and Don Cunnings, RFBC Board Director—Joanne Edey-Nicoll, BCRPA Chief Executive Officer—Rebecca Tunnacliffe, and New Westminster's Manager of Museums and Heritage Services—Rob McCullough, six sector pioneers were interviewed for this project. They were chosen because of their life-long commitment to the recreation and parks sector, their outstanding achievements, as well as service and ongoing involvement with the BCRPA. In the order they were interviewed, they are: Don Cunnings, Ken Winslade, Bill Webster (with Vivian Webster), Mike Murray, Kevin Pike, and Kate Friars. Jeremy Waller - Oral History researcher, contacted and interviewed the six recreation sector pioneers, transcribed the interviews and wrote this summary document.

Surrey Parks, Recreation and Culture Department supported this project by providing graphic services; designing and formatting the document.

CHAPTER ONE

The Early Years: Pro-Rec and Jan (Ian) Eisenhardt: 1932-1958

The period of 1932-1958 was an era of change categorized by the great depression and the inauguration of the recreation sector. In the 1930s the market had crashed, and unemployment soared to 27%. Mines were shutting down, logging camps and fish canneries were closing, in addition to the other industries. The prairies suffered a major drought, causing a dust bowl of biblical proportions to desolate the landscape. The image of houses partially buried in sand, dust choked trees, and homeless families walking west on highways were etched into the minds of Canadians. By 1933, BC was hosting thousands of unemployed women and men from all parts of the country. There were riots and protests across BC, and food-aid lineups stretched around the block in Vancouver, BC.

In 1933, the incumbent Conservatives lost to a Liberal Party led by the legendary T.D. “Duff” Pattullo, who promised “work and wages”. Pattullo’s platform argued that the government had a social and economic obligation to ensure the health and well-being of its citizens. In the beginning, the Liberals rolled out new public work projects, health insurance benefits, and imposed trade regulations on the market. Welfare became more accessible, work-hours required in a business week were lowered, minimum wage increased, and subsidies were provided to primary industries. People in the province began to call these policies the “[Little New Deal](#)” (Schrodt, 1979: 37).

Public works projects sent young men to work camps throughout BC where they worked long days and weeks doing manual labour without any social recreation activities to relieve the pressure. Conditions in the camps were “harsh” (Schrodt, 1979), and the men employed had little choice other than to go along with this ‘solution’ that aggravated their sense of dispossession and helplessness. Many of these men rebelled and riots began to rock the province.

Despite the employment provided by these camps, BC continued to have the highest rates of unemployment in the country. While there were other reasons for this, one largely unspoken factor was that women were excluded from employment in the camps. Unemployed women were “[left to find whatever ways they could to survive](#)” (Cunnings, 2017). It was not until a young immigrant from Denmark named Ian Eisenhardt developed a new program demonstrating the importance of recreation that employment opportunities arose for women.



*Group of women doing a Pro-Rec fitness display in Stanley Park, 1940.
Photo City of Vancouver Archives – CVA 1184-2355*

Ian Eisenhardt immigrated to Canada in 1928, and quickly found a job working for the Vancouver Parks Board (VPB) in the playground department. In four short years, he was promoted to supervisor of playgrounds. Eisenhardt believed that in order for people to live well-rounded lives their activities needed to include sports, games, and other fun activities – not just wage-labour. In his new position at the VPB, he designed a recreation program – Winter Community Recreation – for elementary school children, aged 5-17 years old to increase physical activity and social interaction during the winter months. This program provided children an opportunity to participate in track and field, sandbox contests, story-telling, handicrafts, tennis, or drama classes. Winter Community Recreation was an innovative idea that raised awareness of the importance and benefits of recreation including physical activity and social interaction. Despite its immense popularity, funding ceased within a year due to municipal budget shortages. Even though the provincial government was beginning to realize the value of recreation, their primary concern was to find a solution to the low morale amongst young unemployed people in the province. The government did not realize recreation's potential role in solving this problem.



Jan (Ian) Eisenhardt
*Founding Father of Public Recreation
in BC & Canada*

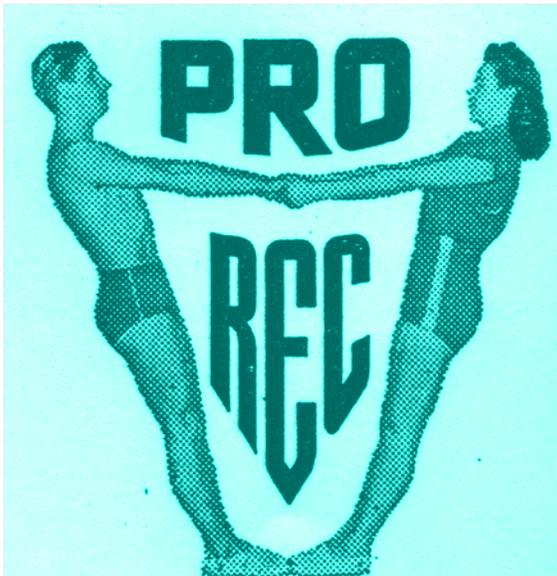
Through Eisenhardt's efforts to find other program funding sources, he caught the attention of R.J. Cromie, the owner of the Vancouver Sun. In 1933, Cromie approached Eisenhardt for a series of interviews. During their third interview, Cromie introduced Eisenhardt to the Liberal Minister of Education, Dr. George Weir, who had recently developed a new branch under his Ministry called the Recreational and Physical Education Branch (RPEB). Dr. Weir invited Eisenhardt to submit a proposal.

Eisenhardt's proposal drew on European recreation philosophy to expand the Winter Community Recreation program and advocate for a province-wide physical recreation program (Schrodt, 1979: 70) that would be implemented through "five major centres in BC" (70). School facilities would be used for programming targeted at unemployed men and women. All activities would be administered centrally through a provincially funded agency.

The proposal was low budget and designed to maximize the synergies between communities, interest groups, business, program "centres", and at all levels of government. Dr. Weir accepted the proposal immediately for its innovative and bold approach and in 1934 offered Eisenhardt the position of director of Provincial Recreation. This program known as Pro-Rec catalysed the growth and development of recreation in BC.



*Jerry Mathisen
Chief, Pro-Rec Instructor*



Don Cunnings describes Eisenhardt as “a prolific writer and very good speaker” (Cunnings, 2017) and further remembers Eisenhardt as being instrumental in dramatically shifting the social and cultural spheres of the province. Cunnings recalls the first time he met one of Ian Eisenhardt’s Pro-Rec Instructors:

A fella came in with a white stripe down the side of his pants and white running shoes and what looked like a Navy t-shirt of some sort. And we were in the pool hall at Joyce Road in Kingsway and he blew a referee’s whistle... that caught people’s attention I can tell you. And he said if any of you think you can fight, come on next door to the school. Well we followed him like the Pied Piper... And found out quickly that boxing wasn’t one of our skills. Even though there were some pretty tough guys I think in the group. I was not one of them included. But anyway he, unbeknownst to us at the time, was a Pro-Rec instructor, Alex Strain.

...after dropping us all on the floor one by one with boxing gloves, he asked us to bring these tumbling mats out. I had never seen those before either, and a year later, thanks to his coaching, I won the junior provincial gymnastic championship for the province. And that got me really interested in recreation and physical education. And so I really couldn’t see too well (Don had cataracts as a boy), in fact I couldn’t see my two fingers a foot away from me. ...But I could see those mats, and I could see the vaulting box and so it was a real confidence builder. And that’s where it all started for me. And as things improved with me and my eyesight over the years I was enrolled in the Pro-Rec Summer School for junior instructors and later for senior instructors. And, in turn that led me to enroll in the school of Physical Education at UBC (Cunnings, 2017).



PRO REC SUMMER SCHOOL - 1941 - Luke Moyles

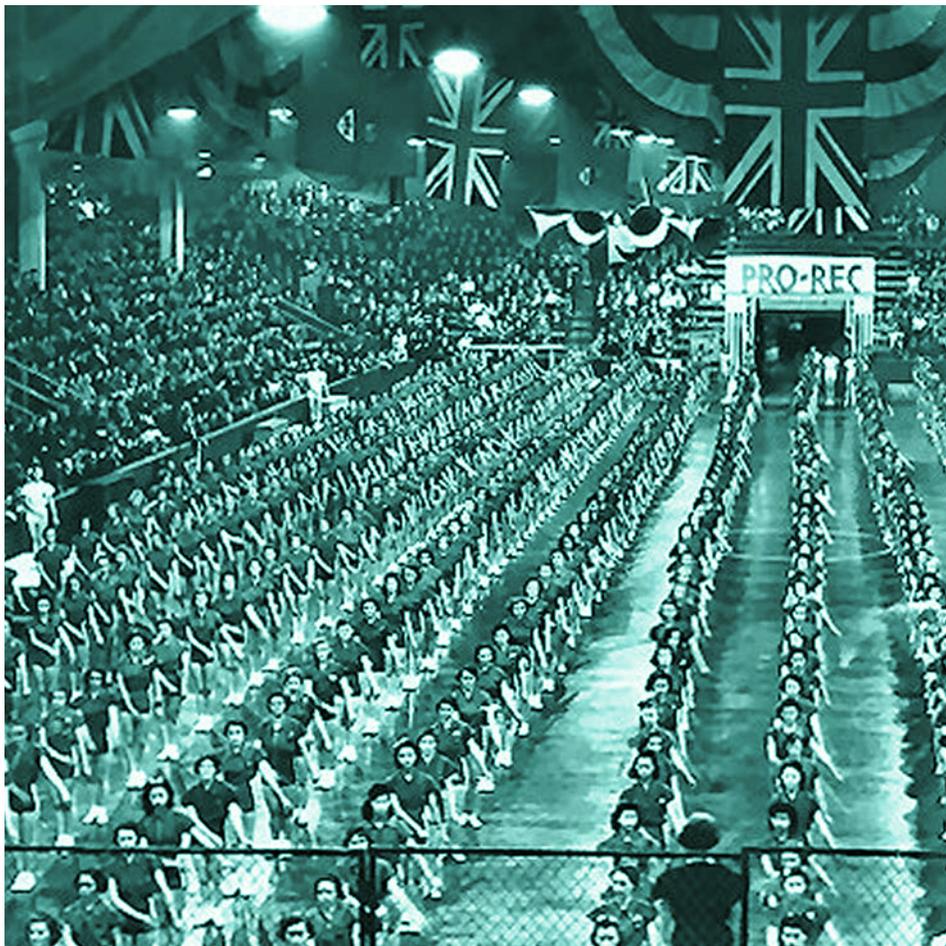
Within a year, nineteen Pro-Rec centres were operating in all five regions of BC. “People were feeling good about themselves even though they didn’t have a job. They had their own fitness and they were competing in sports in all the villages and towns of British Columbia” (Cunnings, 2017). In the beginning Pro-Rec programs were only available to unemployed people, but the program’s popularity soon demanded greater access, and by 1938 there were ninety-two Pro-Rec Centres across the province. Eisenhardt was well aware of the unequal social conditions in the province so he created two Chief Instructor positions for his Pro-Rec program (Schrodt, 1979): a Norwegian gymnast named Jerry Matheson to look after programs for men, and a woman named Hilda Keatley to implement women’s programming throughout the province.

Including women in Pro-Rec was significant, as it opposed the Liberal’s decision to exclude them from public works projects, and represented a progressive step toward gender equality. Keatley added fitness and dance programs to the recreation repertoire of sports and games – an innovation that has had an unfathomable influence on the sector, given the proliferation and growth of these physical forms in public and private organizations to date. Fitness and dance programming have become a key sub-sector in recreation, and it is very arguable that without Keatley’s contributions this sub-sector may never have begun. Keatley’s talent and influence cemented the pivotal role women have continued to play in recreation, making it a leader in the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Canada. Under Keatley’s leadership more women became involved with Pro-Rec than men in every year of the program’s existence.



Activities were implemented mainly in the winter months, and at the end of each season, local newspapers drummed up excitement for the annual mass rallies that were held in Victoria and Vancouver. These demonstrations involved hundreds of members from multiple districts performing choreographed exercises in big halls or auditoriums for the public. Every year they grew and by 1938, 2500 spectators crowded into Victoria's Crystal Garden to watch three hundred Pro-Rec members perform. In 1939, 5000 spectators watched 2000 Pro-Rec participants in the Vancouver Forum move through mass dance routines, highly skilled individual gymnastic displays, and exhibitions of exercise classes involving up to 500 performers at a time.

Participation in Pro-Rec activities peaked in 1938, with 26,831 people enrolled in classes. However, with the 1939 advent of the Second World War membership began to decline. That year Eisenhardt left his Pro-Rec directorship to head the Canadian Army sports program. In 1943 he became the national director of physical fitness for Canada. Seven years later he was appointed the Director of Sports and Games with the Department of Indian Affairs. By 1953, W.A.C. Bennett's conservative Social Credit Party took power in BC and shortly thereafter terminated the 19-year old Pro-Rec program, considering it "a dinosaur" (Cunnings, 2017). In its place, they created the Community Programs Branch ("The Branch"), led by Lawrence (Lawrie) J. Wallace. Mr. Wallace would later be honoured as a life member of the BCRPA.



The Branch divided the province into a number of administrative regions, each with its own regional consultant. To receive professional guidance and financial assistance from The Branch each municipality, village and town council had to establish a recreation commission. These commissions consisted of self-appointed council representatives as well as representatives from school boards, ratepayer associations, etc. Each commission was provided with a budget and operated as an independent municipal body. Over time, they began to hire part-time and full-time staff.



Marshal Smith



Bob Osborn

By the 1950s recreation in the province was represented by the Canadian Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (CAHPER). Marshal Smith, Supervisor of Community Centres and Playgrounds, Vancouver Parks Board believed that as long as this remained the case, recreation would not achieve the visibility and advocacy it needed. “If you think of various sectors as concentric circles, public recreation was way out there on the far concentric circle” (Cunnings, 2017). Smith envisioned an association in BC whose mandate focussed on recreation, an idea that was known as “the Marshal Plan”. In 1957 during a Vancouver conference held by the American-based National Recreation Association a committee was formed and chaired by Robert Osborne. The committee’s focus was to write a constitution for an association that could coordinate and promote recreation in the province.

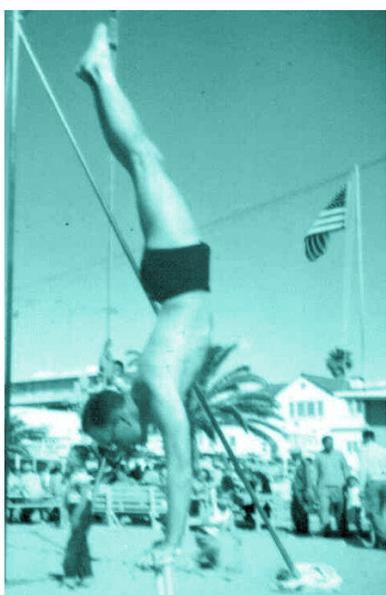
In 1958, the British Columbia Recreation Association (BCRA) was formed. Its mission was to be the “spokesperson for all recreation commissions in BC” (British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association Archive [Archive], 1958: 2), and to elevate and organize the interests of recreation in “all its phases in BC” (Archive, 1958: 2). By design it was to include a mix of laymen and industry professionals, to “awaken the people to an awareness of recreational opportunities in the province, as well as to establish and maintain liaison with government and other groups” (Archive, 1958: 2).



BCRA INAUGURAL 1958



Don Cunnings - 1962



**Don Cunnings
UBC Assist Gymnastic Coach
1958 USA Championships**

The BCRA unified the voice of recreation professionals, municipal governments, and volunteers. This combined voice was heard in 1958 with the introduction of the first Facility Capital Grants Program. The Program was created in partnership between Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments to build recreation and other facilities throughout BC in celebration of the Province's one-hundredth year as a colony of the British Empire. The fund would see many cities build recreation facilities, including a senior's leisure centre in New Westminster called Century House, which was the first of its kind in Canada. The formation of the BCRA and the new relationship with governments signaled the end of an era for recreation in BC and a shifting of cultural norms in Canadian society. As referred to by Ken Winslade during his interview:

"I think back in the 30s, 40s, and 50s people entertained themselves. I mean they didn't look for certain community organized activities. I think once we get into the 50s, people started to look to their communities to provide these services, and these programs. And that just grew and grew. And the expectation and demand grew for the cities to get involved in providing recreation programs, all the great services and facilities. And it just became about changing lifestyles (Winslade, 2017)".

Indeed, the phenomenon of great recreational programming, innovative facilities and services, would continue to grow. The 1960s and 1970s would see undreamed of growth in the sector, along with new kinds of prestige and ever renewing collaborations between recreational professionals, community volunteers, and governments, coordinated and championed by the BCRA.

CHAPTER TWO

Exponential Growth in Recreation: 1959 to 1979

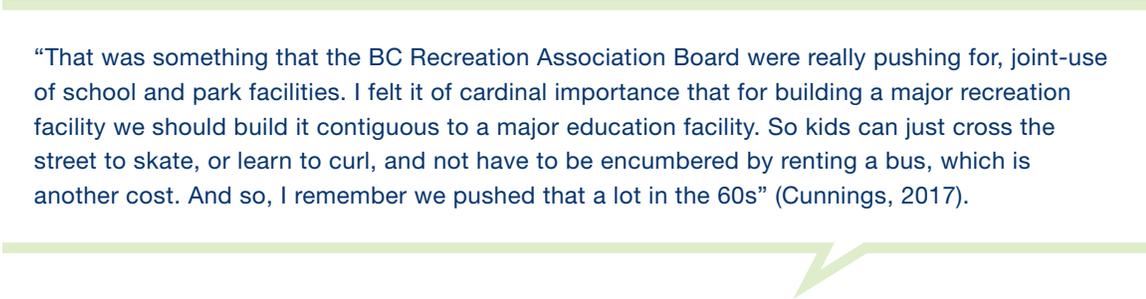
The formation of the BCRA created a central body for communication, networking, and funding. Consequently, strong relationships emerged among stakeholders, including recreation professionals, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and the private sector. Annual BCRPA conferences were an opportunity for stakeholders to share, learn, and network together. Over the next twenty years the BCRA developed a sector accreditation program, improved communications, increased funding, and introduced the concept of environmental sustainability.



In the BCRA's first year as an association, technological and budgetary constraints limited growth and development. Many new positions for recreation professionals were created, but as BC did not have an accredited recreation training program this posed problems for hiring qualified individuals. Further, recreation was still a low priority for local governments. Consequently, there was unanimous agreement in the recreation sector that if it was going to grow its workers, it would need to be regulated and professionalized through education and accreditation.

Since the beginning, education had been a core component of recreation philosophy and it remained central for BCRA. The Association's Board took three actions in the second year to improve education. First, in order to improve communication between the regions the Association created a province-wide sector magazine. Second, they encouraged the development of a Bachelor of Recreation program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Finally, the BCRA Board passed a resolution to have the Provincial School Act changed to enhance and ease "cooperative planning, design and use of facilities after school hours" (Archive, 1960: 4).

"That was something that the BC Recreation Association Board were really pushing for, joint-use of school and park facilities. I felt it of cardinal importance that for building a major recreation facility we should build it contiguous to a major education facility. So kids can just cross the street to skate, or learn to curl, and not have to be encumbered by renting a bus, which is another cost. And so, I remember we pushed that a lot in the 60s" (Cunnings, 2017).



The BC Government was receptive to the resolution and the School Act was amended in 1963; thereby making recreation facilities more accessible to young people, increasing facility usage and thus municipal income, and bringing multiple generations together in a shared safe space.

In 1966 Norm Olenick, now an honorary life member, established a pilot project for Community Recreation 12 while teaching at Burnaby Central. Four years later, with Harold Moist as BCRA president, education and advocacy was further promoted with resolutions to assist "in-service training for people in all the areas of the province" (Archive, 1970: 15), and to advocate for the Community Recreation 12 Program to be "incorporated into the entire school system" (Archive, 1970: 15).

In 1967 Norm was hired by the Vancouver School Board where he implemented the first college two-year career diploma program called the Recreation Leadership Diploma. Three years later he joined Langara College and further developed the Recreation Leadership Program. Following the success at Langara, recreation education programs were instituted at schools such as Douglas College (Therapeutic Recreation), Malaspina (Recreation and Sport), Langara College (Recreation Leadership), Capilano College (Outdoor Recreation), Cariboo College and BCIT (Recreation Facilities Management). All these colleges and universities now offered accreditation in various areas of recreation. In addition, the University of Victoria initiated a Leisure Studies Degree Program, instituting a Co-Op model for students to gain experience and build networks in the field before graduation.



Norm Olenick 2008

Don Cummings was elected president of the BCRA board in 1963. He had recently graduated from UBC's Physical Education Program and had returned to a position as Recreation Director with the City of Coquitlam. Mr. Cummings was also invited to be a committee member on the Provincial Adult Education Committee, providing the opportunity to work closely with the Minister of Education, Leslie Peterson. Mr. Cummings' relationship with the Minister of Education set a new precedent for direct relations with senior provincial level staff. As Don Cummings said: "getting a foot in the door was a major accomplishment for the BCRA back then" (Cummings, 2017).



*Don Cummings
Former Pro-Rec
Instructor*

*Dr. Ian Eisenhart
Founder of
Pro-Rec*

*Norm Olenick
Langara College*

Under Mr. Cunningham's leadership, communications and fundraising were a top priority. Graphics and pictures were added to the magazine to target a wider audience and make it more engaging to read. Members from across the province were encouraged to improve their submissions to the magazine through their own ideas, and ads were solicited from associated industries such as engineering, architecture, construction, and consulting firms. "Back then you had to be all singing all dancing. You had to be a bit of a salesman" (Cummings, 2017).

Beyond education and communications, motions were also passed in the 1960s to seek improved funding structures for recreation facilities through provincial-federal cost sharing initiatives, Grant-In-Aid programs, and new municipal tax levies. Resolutions were also passed to seek bylaw amendments allowing communities more control over the "preservation of recreation lands without infringements of other uses" (Archive, 1960: 4). This is because new provincial measures required municipal committees to find resources for facilities in Class "C" Parks¹. In turn, these efforts to increase community control on parks and recreation eventually led to environmental efforts to reduce industrial pollution in and around parks.



¹ Class C Parks are provincial parks managed by a local board appointed by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. They are generally small parks providing local recreational amenities



Prince George Conference 1964

The BCRA was far ahead of its time by contributing to early environmental movements and concerns. In 1970 the board emphasized the Association’s recreation and parks philosophy by increased parks advocacy.

That same year, it pursued a freeze on the sale of Crown Lands, subject to the evaluation of their recreational use. Stricter enforcement of anti-pollution laws was also sought, in addition to proposing other measures to “prevent commercial operators from disposing of their refuse in a method which was harmful to the province’s natural beauty” (Archive, 1966: 10-11). Of particular concern were tailings ponds² from mining operations and gravel pits³ from aggregate extraction operations (Cunnings, 2017). With regards to the gravel pits, leaders in the recreation sector saw an opportunity to “move a negative to a positive” by looking at them as “land banks” (Cunnings, 2017).

“...the cement company Lafarge Canada wanted to mine below the elevation of an adjoining street close to Coquitlam’s Town Centre, which needless to say was a no-no. So (myself and the other department heads from Coquitlam) met at a restaurant with Mr. Sinclair—who, incidentally, was Pierre Trudeau’s wife’s father and the CEO of Lafarge. When we sat down, I didn’t have an answer for him other than ‘no’. ...But when the waiter came and filled up my glass with water, a light bulb went off in my head. I said to Mr. Sinclair: ‘You know, water in a park is like a fireplace in a living room... So if you would dedicate your freehold lands in perpetuity, as park, and create a lake to our specification, then I think the Council would accept it’. Right away he reached across the table and shook my hand. And that’s when Lafarge Lake went from a glass of water to a lake” (Cunnings, 2017).

It was a win-win, and it became a model for many to follow. In collaboration the BCRPA members and its executive also lobbied to prohibit industrial activities that were polluting the parks and sought innovative solutions to encourage governments and companies to have “end plans” (Cunnings, 2017). Restrictions on toxic operations close to recreational parks were sought, and meetings were secured with the Minister of Mines, Donald L. Brothers, who was receptive and proactive to BCRPA’s concerns.

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- 2 Tailings ponds, also called mining dumps, are fortified pits of leftover toxic liquid from mineral or bitumen mining operations. The wall structure of tailings ponds often break-down which allows highly poisonous liquid to leach into rivers, lakes, and streams.
 - 3 Gravel pits are large open-pit aggregate mines, usually in river valleys, and though often not necessarily toxic, it was common practice for them to be abandoned when no longer profitable.

From 1958-1971 the recreational facility infrastructure in the province had improved exponentially through four federal-provincial transfers for Centennial projects, and recreation was professionalized and regulated to higher standards through its accreditation programs. The BCRPA demonstrated its critical role and benefit for the sector by networking agencies, organizations, members, and citizens; enhancing funding and education opportunities provincially; and raising the credibility of recreation in BC.

In 1967, the Canadian Centennial brought more capital project grants to cities in the province, allowing for additional recreation centres to be built. For example, the Centennial Community Centre in New Westminster. Centennial funding was followed by more Federal and Provincial funding for BC and Canada Summer Games facilities, such as the state of the art Canada Games Pool. Through the same funding initiatives, Queen's Park Stadium and the Moody Park Lawn Bowling greens were upgraded. Shortly thereafter the Provincial Social Credit Government introduced the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP), which brought in funding to build more facilities such as the 1979 construction of the Queensborough Community Centre and "many other park improvements and upgrades in the City of New Westminster" (Winslade, 2017).



Alberta Tour Group – 1971

In 1971 the province established the Community Recreation Facilities Fund. This program would provide one third of the capital cost of a new facility if the remaining two thirds was provided by the community.

So, there was all these huge cash opportunities out there waiting for communities to jump on board. And it all came as a result of the demands from the community for improved and increased services as the communities got bigger and got more organized in the way they did things. So back in the 50s a neighbourhood might have a playground program, but in the 70s they have swimming pools and community centres, ice rinks, curling rinks, everything being built all over the province. And small communities were able to get involved, so you started to see a proliferation of smaller Recreation Commissions and Recreation Departments, and all the small communities in the outlying areas of the province developing good facilities. So that was the big boom from the 1960s up to 1980s (Winslade, 2017).



Eric Broom
University of British Columbia

In August 1974, Eric Broom, consultant to the Provincial Secretariat and faculty member of Physical Education at UBC, organised a tour of European recreation facilities. This tour – subsidized by the Provincial Government – had 20 individuals representing parks and recreation directors, educators, architects, engineers and provincial government staff (Winslade, 2017). Those who went brought back and implemented innovations that many of us in BC take for granted today. Pools that were once uniformly rectangular and primarily only useful for diving and swimming laps, became the leisure and play pools that we see today; built as much for “fun and games” as other recreational pursuits (Winslade, 2017). Adventure playgrounds are another example. All of these “creative new things” contributed to the infrastructure boom and program innovations that occurred through the 1970s and into the early 1980s (Winslade, 2017).

Much of the recreational growth was also a result of community lobbyists. Figure skating, minor hockey and baseball associations began demanding second and third facilities as the number of children registered in these programs continued to grow. Instead of 200 kids in minor hockey there were 400. New Westminster took advantage of the Community Facilities Fund in 1975 and built the Moody Park arena, giving the city a year-round ice surface for the first time. Incidentally, Moody Park Arena was also one of the first arenas in the province that stayed open through the summer. This community activism also brought about changes to playgrounds. “A playground used to be a slide, a swing, and a merry-go-round. Today there are monster architectural things out there. Sometimes I look and wonder... say to myself goodness... you guys planned that?” (Winslade, 2017).

In the 1960s recreation facility managers understood their role to be that of renters of space, but by the mid-1970s their role shifted to become that of a service provider. Providing efficient and effective services required excellent communication with the community members and user groups who used their facilities and required these new services. To improve the communication among program stakeholders (professionals and amateur users), companies were brought in to collaborate with recreation directors, facility managers, and the community. This was the start of the concept of developing more comprehensive plans for recreation facilities and services.

Brian Johnston’s consulting company Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants (PERC) was at the time a leading company in providing these services. Surveys were designed, and new ways of tracking information were developed. In collaboration with city recreation directors and staff, PERC would develop a list of questions. These questions would be complimentary to a cover letter and mailed out to a random sample of 800 to 1000 households. Through these new data collection processes, recreation programmers were able to better understand the trends and adjust to the changing needs of the community.

“The cover letter was personally addressed. So, every single letter and every envelope had to be matched. We had a young woman up the street who was our survey crew and we would take her all of this material and she would then fold the survey and put the stamps on the envelopes, she couldn’t put them through a postal machine because we found that people were more inclined to open an envelope that had a stamp on it than if it had an automated postage stamp. I think we helped pay for her first year of university, because it was tedious work, but she was a good worker. And then I’d often go into the mail and we had to get a certain percentage back or else we had to send it out again. So, it was really quite a process” (V. Webster, 2017).

Study Tour of Sports and Recreation Facilities in England & Europe August 1994

Involvement in the Study Tour

Twenty people from British Columbia attended, providing representation from:

- Architect and Planning Firms
- Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Services
- Community Recreation Facilities Fund Advisory Committee
- Consulting Engineering Firm
- Department of Education - Administrative Services
- Department of Recreation and Conservation - Facilities Fund Administration
- Department of Travel Industry - Community Recreation Branch
- Municipal and Regional Recreation Administrators
- Post-Secondary Education Programs

Individual participants (in alphabetical order) were:

- Terry Barkley, Architect, McNab, Barkley, Logan & Young, Vancouver, B.C.
- John M. Bean, P. Eng., L.M. Bean & Co. Ltd., Consulting Engineers, Vancouver, B.C.
- Eric Broom, Associate Professor, School of Physical Education and Recreation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.
- J. L. Canty, Superintendent of Administrative Services, Department of Education, Victoria, B.C.
- * Don Cunnings, Parks and Recreation Director, District of Coquitlam, Coquitlam, B.C.
- Jan Engemoen, Director, Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Services, Vancouver, B.C.
- Jim Godfrey, Director, Parks and Recreation, Sparwood, B.C.
- Paul Grant, Architect, Waismann Architectural Group, Vancouver, B.C.
- Antony Holland, Chairman, Arts Department, Vancouver Community College - Langara Campus, Vancouver, B.C.
- Derek McCooley, Recreation Consultant, Community Recreation Branch, Abbotsford, B.C.
- Jon MacKinnon, Recreation Consultant, Community Recreation Branch, Kelowna, B.C.
- Murray Matheson, Extension Liaison Officer, Parks Branch, Department of Recreation and Conservation, Victoria, B.C.
- * Norman Olenick, Instructor, Department of Physical Education and Recreation, Vancouver Community College, Langara Campus, Vancouver, B.C.
- Desmond Parker, Architect/Planner, Central Interior Planning Consultants Ltd., Prince George, B.C.
- Mike Powley, Director of Parks and Recreation Services, Delta, B.C.
- Len F. Ryan, Assistant Director of Recreation, Board of Parks and Public Recreation, Vancouver, B.C.
- * Marshal L.A. Smith, Director of Recreation, Board of Parks and Public Recreation, Vancouver, B.C.
- * Gordon Squire, Director of Recreation, Corporation of Burnaby, Burnaby, B.C.
- Ken Webber, Architect, Carlberg, Jackson Partners, New Westminster, B.C.
- Harry Wipper, Director of Parks and Recreation, City of Nanaimo and Regional District, Nanaimo, B.C.



April 18, 2007 Reunion of participants involved in the 1974 Study Tour of Sports and Recreation Facilities in Europe
Missing from photo: Jan Engemoen, Desmond Parker

These new practices were foundational as the data collected indicated the benefits recreation offered to society, and it encapsulated thinking that would grow into the Benefits Movement itself, which emerged in full force by the early 1990s through the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA). It also paved the way for innovation in strategic planning and further collaboration with private consultants, with PERC leading the way.

Other milestones for the BCRPA in the 1970s were the provincial government recognition of the BCRPA, the Outdoor Recreation Council, and Sport BC as “umbrella organizations that could guide and assist with policy and program implementation” (BCRPA website, 2017). In 1972 the National Coaching Certification Program was introduced; in 1975 the BCRPA and Provincial Recreation Society of BC joined offices; and three new Divisions were incorporated into the BCRPA, including the Aquatic, Therapeutic, and Student Divisions.

BCRPA conferences took on greater significance following the conference held in 1975 at the Capri Hotel in Kelowna. With the support of Lawrie Wallace the province gave the organizing committee, chaired by Ken Winslade, additional money to invite speakers. The committee brought in the brightest minds in recreation across North America. Previously, annual conferences had typically been attended by 200 to 300 people. However, 1975's conference, with more than 500 attending, saw more people registered than could fit into the banquet hall. A new generation of recreation professionals were coming into their own, and a strong culture of comradery was forming. Besides the professional development benefits of the conference, people also had a lot of fun. Stories still circulate about people spending late nights together in intermixing groups, with music and great conversation, and general merrymaking. “It was an exciting time, first to see a provincial conference literally outgrow itself. And second, to see the quality of leadership that the sector had developed” (Winslade, 2017). The conference symbolized the growth of the sector, and it also set a precedent for conferences to come. In the context of an era when the Internet did not exist and access to information was dramatically reduced and slower, BCRPA conferences were modes of communication that were critical to growth and development.

“That’s where the growth really came from. All of a sudden, from the City Council point of view, we come back from the conference and we propose that we want to spend \$70,000 to put a waterslide in. And they’re looking at you like you’re out of your mind, you know, ‘what are you talking about’? But by 1975 there’s enough credibility that’s been built, and the Council know the conference is where the cutting-edge ideas and technologies are being presented. So, by 1975 they were saying a lot more of: ‘Well if you think it’s going to work, okay let’s do it’, sort of thing. Try to do that back in the 50s and 60s, and there’s no way. There was no way. Councils would have just slapped you off and said don’t waste their time. But now, they believe this department knows it can work. Everything else they’ve done has worked out, so let’s fire it in, and so they fired it in. And of course, it was a huge success and the attendance went way up. And the community just talked about it and everybody came from all over to try this waterslide. And now everybody puts a waterslide in” (Winslade, 2017).

By the end of the 1970s recreation operations had gained credibility by creating an accreditation standard, lobbying for environmental efforts, and dramatically increasing the funding and therefore number of recreational sites and parks. The turn of the next decade would see a new era of fiscal restraints that would once again pressure the sector, requiring ever new innovations.

CHAPTER THREE

Transformation and the Expansion of Community Development:

1980 to 1999

By the early 1980s the recreation sector had entered into a period of self-assessment and renewal. Canada was moving into a recession that required the sector to evaluate the way it did business. City Councils were requesting greater fiscal accountability and tools such as master plans and business plans became an accepted method to articulate these new expectations. Twenty years of hard work by the BCRPA had secured capacity within the sector to weather these new challenges; but the organization itself was still operating on a modest budget. As a whole, the sector began to look to alternative methods of maintaining its forward momentum.



Its strongest asset continued to be a network of dedicated professionals working in both the private and public spheres. Strong communication, networking and collaboration amongst these professionals would be pivotal elements of survival. In 1980, Bill Webster was hired as the Executive Director for the BCRPA. He would lead the BC recreation field through a period of increased social accountability, financial challenge, and identity renewal.

At the time of his arrival Bill Webster describes the field as coming into its own, “everybody was growing at the same time, and for the most part I think everybody worked well together” (B. Webster, 2017). However, the province had stopped funding transfers to municipalities, and an era of fiscal restraint had begun to disrupt the sector’s network of city departments, community agencies, non-profit organizations and non-government organization. Due to successes of the past four decades, recreation in BC was flourishing and twenty plus years of hard work by the BCRPA had ensured a strong infrastructure of facilities and supportive community programs. The recreation community was stable; bolstered by the confidence of the general populace. However, it was apparent business that could not continue as usual.

Even though new fiscal restraints were challenging they did not hamper the mood of optimism, solidarity, and comradery. Vivian Webster considered it to be “...a period of growth and energy” and “...there was a feeling of cohesion that emerged from the professionalization of the sector. I think that more people were coming from a background of training in parks and recreation administration”, and “...lots of these people that we knew in the field were of the same age” (V. Webster, 2017). Mike Murray felt similarly: “There was a lot of energy still in the field. Despite some of the physical restraints that many agencies had experienced, and I think that energy spoke really to looking forward to what’s next and shaping what may come next” (Murray, 2017).

Social Accountability - Benefits-Based Strategies and Community Development

When they arrived, Bill and Vivian Webster came to an organisation that was “tiny” (V. Webster, 2017), and the magazine was run by volunteers. Like Don Cunnings in the 1960s, Bill took it over himself, volunteering his own personal time to make it happen outside work. He saw it as “a way of presenting really good information” (Pike, 2017), and as crucial to communications in the province. He chose to significantly beef up its advertising element. Besides increasing revenues, it also allowed the magazine to become a critical site to discuss trade-craft and stay up to date on the sector throughout the 1980s. “It was a really a good source to find out what was happening in the province, what was happening philosophically, with articles on Community Development for example, or articles on how you were dealing with your City Council” (Pike, 2017).

During this period City Councils had begun requesting master plans and business plans, effectively reducing recreation to numbers and efficiencies. Directors were forced to either define their worth by reducing their services to expenditures and revenues or look to other ways to describe and define the benefits of recreation and convince Councils of their indispensability. The former strategy would limit the sector by defining its worth in economic terms; feeding market logic and reducing costs by lowering an organization's budget. The latter would grow services. However, with reduced budgets this proved difficult unless operations and goals were extended through collaborative initiatives. This latter strategy would take off with the Benefits Movement in the 1990s. It eventually brought recreation to occupy a core role in municipal operations, perhaps the greatest milestone in the sector to date.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, new provincial funding initiatives such as "Go BC" and "BC 21" had emerged to allow expansions to recreation facilities. However, the sector remained in a culture of tight fiscal control. Reduced budgets required an ongoing search for innovations by city recreation directors. There was "still a lot of energy in the field" (Murray, 2017) but the sector realized that trends of fiscal restraint demonstrated people didn't understand the benefits of recreation and parks services. It was in this context that a conversation began on the national level in the early 1990s. Facilitated by CPRPA, the conversation was distilled into a catalogue called the "Benefits Catalogue" which was released in 1992. The Catalogue outlined the social and economic benefits of recreation and gave recreation professionals "a common way of speaking" (Pike, 2017) which they could take to City Councils. It had become commonplace to hear questions such as "My god, we're spending 50 million dollars, why are we doing that?" (Pike, 2017). The Benefits Catalogue made it easier to point to very specific reasons as to why a given project was important for citizens and communities.

As encouraging as this was, the first catalogue didn't have the desired impact, and in 1997 it was re-written with the benefits of recreation re-articulated in a more fundamental manner. It laid out eight "key outcome messages" (BCRPA website, 2017), which were backed up by forty-four declarations all of which included practical substantiations. The eight messages were:

1. Recreation and active living are essential to personal health – a key determinant of health status.
2. Recreation is a key to balanced human development – helping Canadians reach their potential.
3. Recreation and parks are essential to quality of life.
4. Recreation reduces self-destructive and anti-social behavior.
5. Recreation and parks build strong families and healthy communities.
6. Recreation reduces health care, social service and police/justice costs.
7. Recreation and parks are significant economic generators in your community.
8. Parks, open space and natural areas are essential to ecological survival.

This clearly bridged recreation philosophy and practice into social planning territory, and City Councils began to listen. Whereas recreation to that point had largely been "encouraging people to be the best they can be, and to achieve all that they can in their lives, and with their lives" (Murray, 2017), now the philosophy held that "people's basic needs need to be met before you can move to the next level" (Murray, 2017). Mike Murray described these needs as "everything from shelter, food, water, sense of belonging – all of those things you need before you can actually achieve self-actualization" (Murray, 2017). Philosophically this represented a massive broadening of scope in what recreation services could provide, and recreation directors were aware that their departments could not do it all on their own. A major role of departments that embraced this philosophy was to therefore "encourage networks through a social planning function" (Murray, 2017). This strategy is known as Community Development where:

“...a network of people come together to identify a need in a community that may or may not be recreational. And that network of agencies would decide who was in the best position to deal with it” (Murray, 2017). Or, more specifically, to analyze and make decisions on “where synergies might happen” (Murray, 2017).

This network of partners could include any combination of City departments, non-profit organizations, non-government organizations, governmental organizations, health authorities, school boards, private businesses, and community associations.

Mr. Murray gave the example of a network that emerged at first by accident. The curling rink in Maple Ridge would shut down in the summer months, and largely lay fallow until the following season. The City had identified the need for a place youth could go to hang out, play, and stay out of trouble. The recreation department thought the curling rink could be used in the summer for that purpose. They “built a whole bunch of skateboard ramps and basketball hoops and facilities, and we used that all summer long while there was no ice in it” (Murray, 2017). It was very well used, and it quickly became apparent that a year-round facility was needed. They began looking for a space roughly of equivalent size adjacent to the city’s leisure centre. One was found, and the new Greg Moore Youth Centre opened in 1999. They built into its design a set of social service agencies including a youth medical clinic run by the Fraser Health Authority, and a parenthood planning operation run by a non-profit organization that gave support to single parent families. Teenagers would show up to play pool or shoot some hoops, and because of the convenience of the wellness centre attached to the facility, they also might check in about a physical or mental health issue. Recreation departments and organizations could thus act as nodes for complex social service networks, a role that would only increase with time.

The Benefits Movement, deployed through Community Development initiatives, thus eventually coalesced into the “core philosophy” of the parks and recreation sector, making its way into strategic, master, and business plans of city departments and recreation organizations including the BCRPA. These plans were often carried out by hired private consultants such as Brian Johnston’s company PERC. This company had worked all over the country and had a significant influence on the growth of the Benefits Movement. For years Mr. Johnston had been also attending BCRPA annual conferences and had been part of finding solutions to funding constraints. Many saw the recession of the early 1980s as an opportunity, because it required

“...soul searching around what our field is really about...what Brian was able to bring to master planning in specific communities was knowledge of many, many different parks, recreation, and cultural operations across the country. So, I think he both influenced the sector and learned from what he saw. And from gaining so many different perspectives as a consultant, he became... really quite an influential person and company in recreation” (Murray, 2017).

“Brian brought a feeling to each community that they were unique and special, firstly. Secondly, the firm wasn’t just there to give (an organization) a cookie-cutter version of the last master plan he’d done. ...And I think as well, Brian’s grasp of the broad picture and his ability to blend business – private business – and public business philosophies together. Because he was able to talk very accurately and logically about private goods and public goods and how the one fits with the other” (Pike, 2017).

Gradually the social function of recreation departments increased. Pairing this with public demand for recreation related facilities it became natural to begin including private companies in social planning networks and multi-partner projects – all of which continued to be known as Community Development. City Councils began to understand the power of community engagement and the role of recreation departments in coordinating the delivery of multi-purpose services. This brought about many public/private partnerships (P3s), which have been highly controversial because governments are often negligent in hammering out contract details that get the balance right between the ‘public good’ and the ‘private good’.

“A public good is one that comes out of a service a Council can provide even though only half of the people might participate in the activities. So, public goods come out of recreation services even though everybody doesn’t participate in them. There is a benefit to the community from merely having that service. Whereas a private good is a something that only serves a few interests” (Pike, 2017).

Herein lay the crux of the issue because while it may benefit a community for a private company to construct an arena that a city cannot afford – but is much needed – it will not do the community much good if half the people cannot afford to use it. If, however, the city can negotiate terms in the contract that will see the latter population able to use the facility, then it is possible to make everyone happy. It is therefore a matter of distinguishing between public and private goods.

“And Brian Johnston differentiated private and public goods a lot when he was doing fees and charges studies—because that was another big thing besides strategic planning and master planning; fees and charges studies. And he was able to talk very clearly about where we charge the taxpayer and where do we not charge. ‘Where is a public good that we should subsidize from the taxpayer, and where is it a private good that we should not?’ And he was able to give communities a definition of those kind of things. He has an ability to grasp private-sector philosophy and meld it with public-sector philosophy, and make the two work together. And Councils love this kind of stuff because they were often asking for business plans, rather than the master plans; or business cases—which have been thrown at me so many times in Council meetings. I think Brian’s skill, as well, was and remains an ability to bring differing points of view together. There are a lot of differing opinions around public goods that recreation engenders. And he’s got an amazing ability to take a room full of people and get them all moving out after two hours generally in agreement around how to proceed, because all of their interests are addressed. ‘Yes, we’re going to deal with private, and yes, we’re going to deal with public and, by the way, here’s a service that’s totally private, and if you don’t want to provide it then maybe you should find somebody in the private sector to do it. And so he’s able to go from public-sector benefits of why we need a parks and recreation department, right through to how do you provide this.. how do you provide this privately? Not just how, but why. Why you do that” (Pike, 2017).

In Mike Murray's words:

"P3s I think they have gotten a bad name from time to time because people didn't do a good enough job of identifying what they needed to control out of those relationships, and then discovered later 'well we don't have control over something that was...turns out to have been quite critical for them to control'. So, we learned some lessons and there were some consultants out there that were doing this kind of work from whom we learned those lessons, as well" (Murray, 2017).

While strategic and business plans have clearly contributed to the growth and influence of recreation, there is not unanimous agreement on the benefit of their continued use. "Strategic plans came in part out of Councils and Commissions trying to make parks and recreation into a business. It was more prestigious to be a business, than it was a parks and recreation department" (Pike, 2017). This statement by Kevin is striking, given the fact that organizations that followed the market logic embedded in "strategic plans" to the exclusion of non-economic benefits of recreation tended to have their budgets further constricted. As mentioned above the roots of strategic plans came from economic crisis, and so to some degree, they were a knee-jerk reaction to fiscal restraint. Furthermore, the phrases "strategic plan" and "business plan" encompass a wide variety of practices, so it is virtually impossible to generalize them. Kevin Pike noted this with some frustration:

"You still hear city counsellors saying, 'I need a business plan on this'. No; what you want is a level of public service strategic planning. So, strategic planning and master planning are really kind of similar, strategic plans often become part of a master plan. The problem with them is that things are moving so quickly that if you've got the traditional master plan of 'here's what we're going to do in year one, two, three, four, five, by the time year one, two, three, four, five is up, often those things can be obsolete if you're thinking of doing something else. So the level of planning needs to take that in into account. Communities expect without asking that the city is going to provide streetlights and roads and sewers but there's a lot of flexibility in what services and recreation facilities are provided. And that's why you don't see many sewer master plans, they just kind of go and happen behind-the-scenes. But parks and recreation master plans, you see a lot of. Go back two or three decades, they were incredibly popular. You had to have one. Some provincial and federal granting bodies required that you have at least a strategic plan in place before they would give you any money" (Pike, 2017).

Despite this, strategic planning was instrumental in milestones reached by the recreation sector in the 1980s and 1990s, much in part due to innovative strategists like Brian Johnston and Bill Webster, Kevin Pike, Kate Friars, and Mike Murray, to name a few who found ways to make them work to an advantage. Combined with the Benefits Movement, strategies were created that expanded recreation into realms of health and at-risk-youth services, expanded Community Development partnerships to include police, justice, and social services. Recreation became more responsive to the needs of minority populations and people living in poverty and in the process opened itself to sectors previously thought of as unrelated to recreation. In some cases, social service networks working on a single project involved as many as forty organizations, including non-profit organizations and businesses all coordinated by a recreation department (Murray, 2017).

This growth and prowess ultimately resulted in parks and recreation budgets expanding in some cases to equal and surpass core city departments such as engineering and police departments (Pike, 2017). Don Cunnings pointed out that when the Liberals brought in Ian Eisenhardt to start the Pro-Rec program back in 1933, it was innovative and forward thinking, and yet the budget Pro-Rec required paled in comparison to core department budgets. But something city and provincial governments have learned from the BCRPA and recreation directors over the years is that unlike other departments, recreation funding often returns its weight in gold. For example, in the late 1990s West Vancouver's recreation budget matched the police budget at \$8 million dollars, but recreation services brought back \$8 million dollars in revenue. This kind of funding ratio is exclusive to recreation and parks, and it was a primary reason for the unprecedented growth in recreation budgets through the 1990s.

The Power of Volunteers

Another reason recreation budgets multiply themselves has to do with volunteers. Stretching back to the post World War II era community associations were instrumental in the growth of recreation and park facilities. In the 1940s and 1950s nothing would get built if volunteers in the community did not group together, fundraise, and organize.

Very, very quickly different communities coalesced around key volunteers in the community. In Vancouver, building community centers, when those things started right after the Second World War, communities had to raise a significant amount of money in addition to taxation, just by fundraising initiatives, to get community centres built and started. And that was how the Vancouver Community Association movement started. They had to put an association together to raise the money to get the community centre going. And so those early Community Centres, like Kitsilano, Marpole, and Sunset, even Killarney, which was built in in the late 60s... There's people still talking about having to raise money. ...And they're still here (Pike, 2017).

From the very beginning the BCRPA put an emphasis on volunteers, on building volunteer commissioners and supporting community association presidents. In fact, collaborations between recreation professionals and volunteers in their communities was written into the Association's very constitution. For these reasons several BCRPA past presidents came to the position from outside the field and brought with them new collaborative relationships that strengthened the sector. These synergies between commissions, associations, the parks boards, recreation departments, and the BCRPA continued into the 1990s. Through recreation activities, "...volunteers who know each other, who work together, have gone to battles, who've raised money together" (Pike, 2017), create strong communities.

"There's a tight bond when you sit in the ice rink and watch your kids play hockey, watch them on the field playing soccer, etc. And those are the things that tie communities together. You know, roads are essential and clean water is essential, but parks and rec services do so much more than what you just see in the services. There's this real background to community life and to political life that they nurture. ...And very clearly, that's what parks and recreation is all about" (Pike, 2017).

In many ways, this strong community aspect defines the recreation sector, a legacy of the BCRPA's mandate to encourage lay-professional relationships. From the 1930s to the late 1990s sector philosophies have centred on what good recreation could bring to people's lives. Inherent to this is also encouraging people to do things for themselves, to make their own lives and the lives of others better. Bill and Vivian Webster talked about how lucky they felt to have worked in recreation. They were quick to deflect responsibility for successes and milestones in recreation to other people, to other professionals and volunteers. Referring to volunteers and professionals alike Bill said: "Really it's them, you know, who did it all, you know what I mean?" (Webster, 2017). Don Cunnings, Ken Winslade, Mike Murray, Kate Friars, and Kevin Pike too, were humble in this way. Over a period of sixty years the sector grew from a single provincial program into a thousand different networks and organizations, associations, commissions and departments, branches and groups. The field is constantly shifting and evolving, innovating and solving, and it continues to grow through the 2000s.

Addressing Funding Challenges within the BCRPA

Some of the earliest strategies undertaken by the BCRPA to make up funding shortfalls were to increase the membership through conference incentives, to build up corporate advertising in the magazine, and to diversify their donor base. Bill Webster's experience working in the private sector was invaluable to expanding the BCRPA's networks. People he had worked with before, like Brian Johnston, were big contributors to the organization, through both donations and advertising.

In 1985, with the Association still struggling to meet its financial needs, Bill Bennett's Social Credit government created the BC Lottery Corporation (BCLC), legalizing gambling and redirecting profits into grant monies for community organizations. Bill Webster and the BCRPA Board jumped at this new funding opportunity. As Vivian Webster attested to: "The funds were so tight that we literally had a balance sheet that was, you know, like we made two dollars here, two-hundred there..." (Webster V., 2017). But while the BCLC initiative brought in better revenues than other fundraising approaches at the time, there was a price to pay. The first manifestation of the program gave organizations and community groups the opportunity to run bingo halls on selected nights and take the profits. Vivian Webster explained:

"These bingo halls would open in various areas around the lower mainland, and charities were allowed [to collect] the proceeds from a particular night. And I can give you a list of names of people who you could ask about bingo and they would probably want to shoot you (laughs) because there was so many of us [healthy recreation people] that spent smoke-filled Friday evenings picking up ash trays and emptying them while people playing bingo...abused us if we got too close to their bingo cards. Because you had to go through this torture in order to get your proceeds" (V. Webster, 2017).

The program soon expanded from bingo halls to casinos, which turned out not to be much better. The money was sometimes bigger, but the hours were longer, and there was always the risk that a player would win their profits, rendering their labour futile. In a year, they might make \$3,000 "if we were lucky" (V. Webster, 2017).

It was in this fiscal environment that the BCRPA began discussions around creating the BC Recreation and Parks Foundation (BCRPF). The Provincial Government had again reduced their operating support and things had become so bad that the Association's account was overdrawn. The Board was asked to sign their names to a document that would make them personally responsible should the organization go under. Everyone happily signed, but the executive knew things could not go on like this much longer. Therefore, Bill Webster, Kevin Pike, and many others on the BCRPA Board thought that they could create a foundation, and raise \$500,000 in an endowment fund that could then act as a resource for the Association. This project was formalized in 1986 and Bill Webster became the BCRPF's first chair, with Kevin Pike and other BCRPA board members taking positions on the new organization's board of directors. It was a massive risk that turned into a great success, and was instrumental in helping the BCRPA survive the lean years.

Initially the Recreation Foundation took over the fundraising, with all of the proceeds given to the BCRPA. This continued until it was no longer feasible and by the beginning of the 1990s they began to build the endowment fund through two primary fundraising initiatives. First, an administrator's conference held annually in Harrison Hot Springs, and second, an annual golf tournament. Both of these events generated significant annual funds (each reaching the \$40,000 mark in the 2010s). The Harrison Hot Springs event included a "Recre-Auction" every year, with Foundation members and others donating everything from a fancy dinner at Kevin Pike's house to barbecues and art, which was a significant factor in the event's success. In 2006, the BCRPF changed its name and brand, becoming the Recreation Foundation of BC (RFBC), as it remains today. It no longer raised funds for the endowment but continued to manage the endowment fund. In 2015, the RFBC turned to the Vancouver Foundation to assist with the management of the fund. In 2006 the RFBC began raising money for a grant program that could distribute funds throughout the province to recreation organizations and projects. The first program opened in 2011, giving out almost \$400,000 to organizations and communities to date. In 2017, BCRPA and RFBC created a joint fundraising committee to increase the endowment fund.

Expansion of the BCRPA's Jurisdiction and Identity Renewal

It was with "very, very careful budgeting" (Bill Webster, 2017) that great work continued to be done, including lobbying efforts in 1980 to stop mineral exploration on Gambier Island, to release the first issue of a new newsletter called Synergy, and to initiate the Association's first master plan. Other notable activities of the 1980s were to turn a separate volunteer organization, called the Recreation Society of BC into the Professional Development Branch of the BCRPA, to initiate the Sport and Recreation Council for the Disabled, and perhaps most significantly to create a Fitness Leadership Registration system.

This Fitness Leadership Program initiative arose out of the incredible boom of fitness in BC, at the time, in both the private and public sectors. The problem was that without proper regulation of instructor training a crisis of quality, safety, and professionalism loomed on the near horizon. There was a wide gamut of variously qualified people working in fitness, some of them with very little training or education. Therefore Mr. Webster worked with a committee of fitness stakeholders to come up with specific guidelines, requirements, and standards for fitness instructors and directors. It unified hiring practices in municipal departments and private business alike, setting standards through BCRPA qualifications and fitness leadership tests, and it became universally recognized by fitness leaders throughout the province. It also led to the formation of the Fitness Branch within the BCRPA, again boosting the membership which reached 1000 for the first time in 1986.

With the inclusion of the Fitness Branch, the BCRPA now had several different branches, including Aquatics, Parks Branch, and Professional Development, each of which with its own universe of advocacy and activities. Each had their own committee, news-letters, and workshops. Under Bill Webster's leadership, this system was expanded with the creation of individual branch conferences that were held separate to the annual BCRPA conference—which also continued to grow. The first of these, in 1983, was a fitness conference held in Vancouver's Robson Square, and was very successful. To make up for shortfalls in funding, partners were solicited from the private and public sectors to come together in a sponsorship and producing network for the conference. Thus, it marked a deepening of Community Development practice, wherein Recreation Departments and organizations “didn't have to be everything to everybody” (Mike Murray, 2017).

Also, during the 1980s, many members of the BCRPA's board and executive began to feel the organization had long been advocating for the needs of both the parks and recreation industries. They were concerned that professionals working in parks would begin to feel alienated if they didn't see their work reflected by the BCRPA. There was a concern the sector would disaggregate. This led some board members to suggest Parks should be added to the organization's name. As Kevin Pike remembers “people use[d] parks to recreate, the same as they do leisure centres ...parks and recreation can't be separated, they are one and the same” (Pike, 2017). In 1981, “parks” was indeed added to the BCRA name, to become The British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA), as it remains today.

To illustrate the relationship between parks and recreation philosophy and practice, Ken Winslade shared an anecdote. When the Woodlands School in New Westminster – a residential facility for people with severe mental and physical disabilities – closed in 1996, the Liberal government's BC Development Corporation wanted to develop condominiums on the 120-year old site. Besides, the heritage buildings that dated back to 1878, there were a plethora of mature and diverse trees slated to be destroyed, as well as acres of open green space. At the time Ken was Administrator for the Parks and Recreation Department in New Westminster:

...and I remember talking to the planning department at the City. I said: ‘My vision has three or four really important things: protect the trees, keep 65% of the space open, hook it into the ravine park, and save the vista’. Because the one thing we didn't have (in New Westminster) was what I call a vista park, a place where you could sit, and look up the river, to Mount Baker. I also said I want an overpass to Queen's Park. Because I wanted a connection with Queen's Park, to connect with the trail system on the other side of the highway. I always had that vision. And so when the planning department wrote up the criteria they finally agreed. ...You know we want space. We don't want it jammed in with a million buildings. And now it's pretty and open in most of its areas. I wasn't concerned about saving the heritage [buildings]. That was for somebody else to worry about. I was more concerned about the open space, the trees, because it was a gorgeous site. And today when I drive by there, and look up, I see that huge vista still there, where you can still look out. And I'm thinking, ‘no one's going to appreciate that except me because they'll take it for granted’. But what you have to realize is that people had a great vision at some point. Just like somebody named Colonel Moody had a great vision when he planned New Westminster, to save Moody Park, Queen's Park, and, Tipperary Park...” (Winslade, 2017).

CHAPTER FOUR

Health, Well-being, and the Legacy of Recreation: 2000 to Present

Over the last forty years, community centres, hockey arenas, pools, senior centres, youth centres and passive and active parks have evolved. During this period, the BCRPA became a key player in social planning, working in collaboration with government groups and community organizations to address social issues. The progression shifted the culture of recreation in such a way that families now relied on organized recreational activities to occupy their children's time and to meet the standards for education and child-rearing in society. Now at the turn of the century, BCRPA turned some of their attention to an underserved population including new immigrants, homeless people, and people with mental illness.



To develop new programs for these populations, the BCRPA identified the provincial Ministry of Health as a source of funding and surmised that through building new partnerships this would continue to build their credibility. To partner with the Ministry of Health, the BCRPA was required to set and achieve “health indicators” (Friars, 2017). As such, the BCRPA revised their strategic plan to focus on five levels of population health and well-being: individual, community, environment, economic, and organization.

Kate Friars understood the shift in the sector’s rhetoric from social planning to health as a “softening of language” (Friars, 2017) from “quality of life” (as in the benefits movement) to “physical abilities and physical literacy...to talk about health and well-being, as opposed to evolving that social aspect of benefits to recreation” (Friars, 2017). While this was a challenge for some municipalities, BCRPA’s new strategic plan was approved by the Ministry of Health, and their budget increased from \$300,000 to \$3.1 million within a few years, as the Ministry of Health redirected monies from health-oriented non-governmental organizations to the recreation sector.

Recreation evolved during the new millennium to start to align with the Ministry of Health’s focus. One example of a community centre securing new Ministry of Health funds for an annual special event was Edmonds Community Centre. The Centre was opened to act as a hub that would bring various populations together to provide a safe place to address social issues and improve population health.

“...it’s an area with visible issues related to poverty and homelessness, there’s visible issues related to immigration and new immigrants and there’s related issues between all of them, but each population would have different agencies looking after them. So, it was about bringing those agencies together, to say, you know, we need to be focused on ways in which we can support these folks to access social engagement, whether it’d be through recreation programs or, social gathering spaces” (Friars, 2017).

One annual event at the Edmonds Community Centre was the Fall Fair.

“It was an annual celebration out in the back field behind the old Community Centre. And it was a phenomenon. You know, there was a high population of East Indians in the community, and a large number of new immigrants had moved to the area from other ethnic communities. Everybody was kind of saying ‘yeah, we all have kind of the same issues, and thank you very much to all these groups. And they’d all come out and celebrate at this particular event. So, you look at your work of just trying to understand their needs and then work with them to help solve problem to address those needs, and that’s fundamental basic community development that you bring what you can to the table and then you just make sure that everybody else is there. And in the early days there’d probably be 200 people, but within a few years there’d be approximately 500-800 sometimes. I think, even 1000 people sometimes in this open field and everybody having a good time” (Friars, 2017).

This kind of event shared resources among different organizations and agencies (economic and organizational health), gave isolated individuals time to interact and meet new people (individual well-being), and brought different groups of people together to form new bonds in the community (community health). However, “hitching your wagon to health” (Friars, 2017) had its challenges because it was difficult to identify concrete outcomes to funders. “It was just really hard to describe...it was hard to defend” (Friars, 2017).

For example, when Friars was first hired as the recreation director for Burnaby one of the first things she was asked to look into was funding youth services, and how the recreation department could get involved.

“There was an old school in my geographic area that included Metrotown. It was an old school that had had a fire and there were two classrooms that were still structurally sound and usable, that had been passed to the municipality. And there was some chatter just before I arrived that it might make a good community centre, or a youth centre. So, I took it on, and we looked at the ways in which we could make it happen. We put a budget together and I remember specifically standing in front of the Commission, the Parks and Rec Commission of the day and presenting my first year report and I said: ‘Okay, this year we had 2500 kids come through, we sent them on however many trips, we did this, we did that, and everybody had a good time...and for a \$165,000 that’s what you got. But I said what you really got was two kids who connected to our staff that had been living on the street...our staff facilitated connections to the appropriate support agencies and those kids were now homed and had returned to school. I said that’s what you really got for \$165,000” (Friars, 2017).

It was the lived experience and personal story of those two children that had an impact. However, predicting those kinds of physical outcomes was challenging and unrealistic when applying for the funding.

“That’s so hard to describe. What you do, and what is truly valued by your community. It’s not just the number of people who come through your door. It’s really the kind of impact you have on them when they pick a swimming lesson, or they go to the skate park, or they take part in a community event, or maybe they volunteer on a trail clean up. That’s the kind of impact that is really, really hard to describe. And, we would take anecdotal information through surveys and what not, but really, how do you truly demonstrate the kind of impact that you had and what kind of difference is it going to make (Friars, 2017).

This Ministry of Health’s funding increases served the sector well with city recreation budgets and activities largely maintaining their unprecedented levels from the 1990s. However, the natural degradation of facilities that were now 25 to 40 years old was a capital funding problem that emerged in the 2000s. Even for a moderately sized community of 45,000 like North Vancouver that was trying to replace a building with a pool, curling rink, and ice rink. This kind of facility can cost over \$160 million today. To make a direct comparison, the Canada Games Pool in New Westminster cost \$6 million back in 1973, while in the 2000s it cost Surrey \$60 million to build their new pool in the Grandview Heights area. This amount of money was simply not available to many cities. Recreation departments have been faced with the choice to “make do” (Friars, 2017) with crumbling facilities by patching them together as best they can, to build smaller facilities and significantly reduce their operating costs (and thus programming); or to find corporate partners to build new, state-of-the-art premises (that have the potential for unseen compromises).

Kevin Pike participated in a BCRPA committee in the 2000s that reviewed the capital shortfalls for new buildings and renovations throughout the province and found that: “The Federal Government is not putting money in, and the Provincial Government is not putting capital money into new projects like they did in the 60s. So, whether you’re a rural community, or an urban one, it’s the same kind of problem” (Pike, 2017).

This changed to some degree in 2010 with the Vancouver Olympics, bringing in new monies and political will for improved recreation infrastructure in Metro Vancouver; but it still remains a major hurdle today. However, amidst financial constraints, the BCRPA continues to advocate, innovate and create new spaces for programs that continue to positively impact the lives of all Canadians.

As we reflect back on the days of Ian Eisenhardt and the Pro-Rec movement to the present, it is an opportunity to share the achievements, and significant growth in recreation and parks. It is also an opportunity to reaffirm the core tenets - education, advocacy and fitness - that founded the legacy of recreation and parks and continues to spur on new innovation and development.

If you look around greater Vancouver at some of these aquatic centres that are being built and some of these other community arenas and community centres that are being built. They are they are just high-quality things. I mean I just really marvel at them. And I use an example of the artificial turf fields. Back in the 70s nobody could afford an artificial turf field in Greater Vancouver. In my time, there was just no way I would even take a concept of doing an artificial turf field to the city. Because they’re a million dollars. And the city didn’t have \$1 million to do them and I knew it would be wasting my time. Today, every community has got one and two or three artificial turf fields. (Winslade, 2017).

From gravel fields to artificial turf, outdoor concrete swimming pools to community centre pools with moving hydraulic bottoms and swings and monkey bars to “monster playgrounds” (Winslade, 2017) the recreation sector has forever changed. The state of hockey in Canada would not be where it is without the perseverance and foresight of recreation professionals and lay people advocating for evermore ice-rinks and accessibility for all populations. Recreation pioneers who once had to struggle to “get their foot in the door” (Cunnings, 2017), moved into city administrator positions where they had critical influence. It is thanks to the philosophy behind recreation that today once industrial waterfronts have become beautiful places to walk and relax. It is no exaggeration to say that it is because of recreation that having ‘livable cities’ is a priority for society in BC.

The recreation and parks sector is flexible, resilient and strong. These characteristics are synonymous with its leaders which will ensure longevity of the field. For eighty years the sector has survived because its leadership has recognized its social benefits and demonstrated this for the community. As long as this value is not lost the sector’s future is secure.

We acknowledge and thank the recreation pioneers Don Cunnings, Ken Winslade, Bill & Vivian Webster, Mike Murray, Kevin Pike, Kate Friars who agreed to share their stories and memories from the last 86 years.

APPENDIX

BCRPA Pioneer Biographies



Don Cunnings

Don was a member of the Vernon Conference planning committee for the BCRA in 1958. Prior to this, Don was a part-time Pro-Rec instructor in the Lower Mainland during his adolescent years. In 1955 he was appointed as the first Recreation Director for the then District of Coquitlam. His success in his career lead him to be the President of the BCRA Board from 1963 to 1965; and in 1966 he became the Parks and Recreation Director for the City of Coquitlam in which position he remained until his retirement in 1993. Don has been active in key BCRPA-related organizations such as: Elected in 1964 to the position of Vice President of the Canadian Association of Physical Education, Health Education & Recreation (C.A.P.H.E.R) for Canada; Appointed President in 2005-2007 of the Board of Directors for the Douglas College Centre for Sport, Recreation and Wellness Society Notably, Don is a Honorary Life Member of the BCRPA (2008). On May 5, 2014, the City of Coquitlam conferred its highest honour "The Freedom of the City" on this former Park and Recreation Director. And again, on September 2, 2015, the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Education, recognized Don as one of 100 Alumni for his dedication, impact and expertise as a community leader in the field of public recreation.



Ken Winslade

Ken Winslade is a graduate of the University of British Columbia with both a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Physical Education and Recreation. He was employed by the City of New Westminster, B.C. from 1965 until his retirement in 2003. During this time Ken served as Director of Recreation, and, Parks and Recreation Administrator before assuming the position of City Administrator.

Ken was an active member of many organizations and was Vice President of the British Columbia Facilities Association, member of the Board of Regents for the Pacific Northwest Maintenance Management School, President of the Recreation Society of B.C., Chairman of the Provincial Recreation Conference and Pacific Northwest Regional Conference, Chairman of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council, and a member of the Editorial Review Committee for the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. He is a member of the American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration.

Ken served on a variety of committees and special projects for the Government of British Columbia, and lectured at the University of British Columbia in Recreation Administration and Management.

Ken represented the Pacific Northwest Region on the National Recreation and Parks Association Board of Trustees. He has been Chairman of the Trustees Professional Development Committee, and Chairman of the National Recreation and Parks Association National Awards Program, and a member of the executive committee of this Association.

Ken has been the recipient of a number of awards including the Citation Award from the recreation Society of B.C., the Leadership Service Award from the National Recreation and Parks Association the President's Award from the B.C. Recreation and Parks Association, the Distinguished Professional Award from the American Association of Parks and Recreation Administration. He is a honorary life member of the B.C. Recreation and Parks Association.



Bill Webster

Bill's career in Parks and recreation has spanned more than 40 years and included work in the public, private and non-profit sectors. His first working experience was in New Westminster where he served as Assistant Director for the Parks and Recreation Department under Ken Winslade. He moved on to become the Director of Recreation for the City of Surrey, before taking over as the Director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Delta. He was President of the Board for the BCRPA from 1973 to 1975, and in 1981 became the organization's Executive Director where he remained until 1989. During that time Bill oversaw the creation of the RFBC (formerly the BC Recreation and Parks Foundation) and he continued to manage that organization until 2006. In 1990 Bill joined the private consulting firm PERC (Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants) where he became a partner and senior consultant until his retirement in 2010. He is the recipient of numerous awards including the BCRPAs Citation Award for Outstanding Achievement, and the NRPAs Pacific Regional Council Service Award. He is an Honorary Life Member of the BCRPA.



Vivian Webster

Vivian Webster's work in the field of Parks and Recreation spanned over 40 years in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. In addition to working as Secretary to the Civic Properties Commission and the Parks and Recreation Commission for the Corporation of Delta, she also spent 20 years as the Office Manager for Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants. She served as the Administrative Coordinator for the BC Recreation and Parks Association from 1979 until 1992, and continued her role as co-manager of the Recreation Foundation of British Columbia until 2015.



Mike Murray

Mike began his involvement in recreation leadership in the New Westminster YMCA as a teenager, moving on to youth program leadership and a variety of other roles in the New Westminster Parks and Recreation Department while attending UBC to obtain his degree in Recreation Education. He enjoyed working with a variety of colleagues in the East Kootenay's becoming President of the East Kootenay Recreation Association. Following his move to Maple Ridge as the Recreation Superintendent in 1977 he assumed the role of Chair of the BC Professional Recreation Association which eventually became a branch of the BCRA (later the BCRPA). He served as President of the BCRPA in 1988-89. Mike's roles in Maple Ridge changed over time as he assumed the position of General Manager of Parks, Recreation and Community Development eventually incorporating Social Planning into his departmental responsibilities. Following his retirement in 2010 he became a trustee on the local board of education where he continues his service. Mike has received a number of awards over the years from organizations it has been his privilege to serve. Most notable among them are the 1994 BCRPA Citation of Outstanding Achievement and the 2011 Maple Ridge Citizen of the Year award. He is an Honorary Life Member of the BCRPA.



Keven Pike

Kevin Pike has worked in the municipal parks and recreation field for 45 years in Edmonton, Vancouver, West Vancouver, and now in the private sector. During his tenure as Director of Parks and Community Services in West Vancouver he modernized the Park services and oversaw the replacement of \$50 Million of recreation facilities. Kevin has broad experience in working with elected officials and with community groups and associations. He has a background in arts and culture, sport, playing fields, youth services, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and the construction of various kinds of park and leisure facilities. Kevin has volunteered extensively and continues to serve the BCRPA and the Therapeutic Recreation program at Douglas College. In 2008 he received the Award of Merit from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. He is a past president of the BC Recreation and Parks Association and a recipient of its Citation of Outstanding Achievement. Kevin retired from the District of West Vancouver at the end of 2008 in order to devote time to other pursuits.



Kate Friars

Hard to believe it's been 50 years since Kate first worked at the YMCA in Dartmouth NS as a teen leader teaching a gym and swim program for the community. Her career has spanned almost 40 years in Municipal Parks and Recreation having worked for the City of Halifax, Vancouver, North York (before amalgamation), Burnaby, and Victoria. Kate became the Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture for the City of Burnaby in 1996 and retired from the City of Victoria in the same capacity in 2014. She is currently living in Nova Scotia and has a second career again as the Director of Parks Recreation and Culture for the Municipality of East Hants, a bedroom community of Halifax.

During her whole career Kate has volunteered her time and efforts with provincial and national Parks and Recreation professional associations. Serving on several committees with BCRPA she was the president from 2000 to 2001. During this time, she led a number of initiatives highlighting the inequities for girls and women in sport and recreation. Kate also served on the CPRA Board as President prior to the Association reformatting itself to an alliance of Provincial and Territorial Associations to better serve the needs of the sector.

Honorary Life Members

The BCRPA awards Honorary Life Membership to people who have embodied its core values over a life time of service in the province. Those values are to be a spokesperson for the sector, to promote and coordinate the interests of parks, recreation, physical activity and the cultural sector in all its manifestations, and to encourage lay-professional collaborations. While it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this oral history to include all of them in the present oral history, this document is dedicated to their exemplary passion and service. As of December, 2017, they are:

May Brown

Robert Osborne *deceased*

Don Cunnings

Jim Panton *deceased*

Brian Johnston

Myrtle Thompson *deceased*

Laird McCallum *deceased*

George Wainborn *deceased*

Harold Moist *deceased*

Lawrie Wallace *deceased*

Mike Murray

Bill Webster

Norman Olenick

Ken Winslade

BCRA & BCRPA Past Presidents

Revised: 2018/01/20

YEAR	PRESIDENT	YEAR	PRESIDENT	YEAR	PRESIDENT
1958-59	Prof. Bob Osborne	1979-80	Marguerite Morrison	2000-01	Kate Friars
1959-60	Ray Gould	1980-81	Doug Thring	2001-02	Betty Johnston
1960-61	Elmo Wolfe	1981-82	Al Argent	2002-03	Ken Krieger
1961-62	Elmo Wolfe	1982-83	Mike Brow	2003-04	Kate Sparrow
1962-63	Bruce Saunders	1983-84	Dr. Eric Broom	2004-05	Doug Henderson
1963-64	Don Cunnings	1984-85	Bob Vaughan	2005-06	Susan Mundick
1964-65	Don Cunnings	1985-86	Gary Young	2006-07	Patti Murray
1965-66	Al Thiessen	1986-87	Kevin Pike	2007-08	Tom Osborne
1966-67	Gordon Squire	1987-88	Doug Brimacombe	2008-09	David Graham
1967-68	Harold Moist	1988-89	Mike Murray	2009-10	Lorri McKay
1968-69	Harold Moist	1989-90	Ron Austen	2010-11	Dean Gibson
1969-70	Harold Moist	1991-91	Nancy Chiavario	2011-12	Leslie June
1970-71	Harold Moist	1991-92	Ken Yates	2012-13	Murray Kopp
1971-72	Bert Limber	1992-93	Janna Taylor	2013-14	Gordon Pederson
1972-73	Les Spooner	1993-94	Agnes Szilos	2014-15	Ron Higo
1973-74	Bill Webster	1994-95	Brian Storrier	2015-16	Darryl Condon
1974-75	Bill Webster	1995-96	Anne Titcombe	2016-17	Heather Turner
1975-76	Norma Sealey	1996-97	Earl Erickson	2017-18	Jennifer Wilson
1976-77	Norma Sealey	1997-98	Patti Hunter		
1977-78	Jack Boutillier	1998-99	Monty Holding		
1978-79	Marguerite Morrison	1999-20	Barry Reid		

BCRA & BCRPA Conference Dates And Locations

Revised: 2018/01/20

DATE	LOCATION	DATE	LOCATION	DATE	LOCATION
1958	Vernon	1979	UBC	2000	Harrison
1959	(UBC)	1980	UBC	2001	Kelowna
1960	Trail	1981	Vernon	2002	Victoria
1961	Penticton	1982	Penticton	2003	Vancouver
1962	Vancouver (NRA)	1983	Vernon	2004	Penticton
1963	Courtenay	1984	Penticton	2005	Prince George
1964	Prince George	1985	Prince George	2006	Vancouver
1965	Victoria	1986	Richmond	2007	Kamloops
1966	New Westminster	1987	Port Alberni	2008	Victoria
1967	Banff	1988	Kelowna	2009	Whistler
1968	Pt. Alberni	1989	Whistler	2010	Penticton
1969	Trail	1990	Castlegar	2011	Richmond
1970	Vancouver	1991	Terrace	2012	Victoria
1971	Kitimat	1992	Victoria	2013	Whistler
1972	Vancouver	1993	Prince George	2014	Kelowna
1973	Salmon Arm	1994	Harrison	2015	Victoria
1974	Naramata	1995	Kamloops	2016	Whistler
1975	Kelowna	1996	Duncan	2017	Kelowna
1976	Victoria	1997	Whistler	2018	Vancouver
1977	Penticton	1998	Penticton		
1978	Vernon	1999	Nanaimo		

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