

# **PUBLIC RECREATION SALVATION**

**BIG SECOND EDITION**

**It's still free at**

**<http://www.publicrecreationsalvation.com>**

**By  
Leonard John**

**To Kathi, Nathan, and everyone  
who goes to a public recreation area.**

COPYRIGHT 2010 through the certified mail process.

**Reprinted by permission of the GRAND TERRACE NEWS  
September 16, 2010:**

## ***Youth Drop-In Recreation***

Children 5-12 years old can participate in a variety of indoor/outdoor games, crafts, activities, field trips, and special events. The program is **free of charge** and runs Monday - Friday 2:30 - 5 p.m. The events are held at the Gonzales Community Center, located at 670 Colton Avenue in Colton.

Participants must have a registration card on file in order to participate. For more info call (909) 370-

**Colton, California still reaches out to youngsters like the author's  
hometown recreation department did in 1956...**

# **CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>LEGACY</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>RETURN TO A SERVICE PERSPECTIVE</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>SOLUTION OR DISSOLUTION</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>MILLION DOLLAR ANTI - GANG STUDY -- FREE</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>CITY HALL -- WITH ALL DUE RESPECT</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>PUBLIC RECREATION MANAGEMENT</b>
<b>34</b>	<b>RECREATION LEADER/SITE SUPERVISOR</b>
<b>45</b>	<b>OPERATING YOUR COMMUNITY CENTER</b>
<b>63</b>	<b>CONTRACTUAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION</b>
<b>74</b>	<b>YOUR FACILITY'S CARETAKER</b>
<b>83</b>	<b>TAXONOMY OF INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS</b>
<b>110</b>	<b>SAND LOT SPORTS</b>
<b>138</b>	<b>STAKE HOLDERS AND VOTERS</b>
<b>144</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
<b>146</b>	<b>ADDENDUM~ RECREATION SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS</b>

## **LEGACY**

**I walked on a public recreation area in 1956 just looking for a place to be. I was curious, and wanted to be part of whatever was happening. A congenial recreation employee offered me friendship. This was a businesslike tactic to monitor my use of the playground, and facilitate my inclusion into the appropriate group. The simple “drop-in” activities, while free of charge, were a privilege I earned by respecting the site and my fellow patrons.**

**The city employee, our “coach,” learned my name. I was introduced to a couple of new friends. I had joined a group. Park oversight was consistent. We engaged in the work of children, which is the serious business of play. The coach gave me a permission slip my folks could sign. With my contact information on file, I was allowed to check out equipment. We played sports and games year round. My parents could not have afforded to pay.**

**The good foundation I received from spending my formative years as a park patron came as a result of experiencing well adjusted leaders operating their recreation programs. Interactive leadership provided a powerful role model. Then, as a seventh grader, I was allowed to coach our elementary aged basketball team. The coach died when I was in the ninth grade, and I vowed to replace him. I spent the next 43 years of my life giving back what he gave me. I gave all I could because of the difference his wonderful service had made in my life.**

**I came up through my neighborhood playground and the nearby community center. The center staff was never too busy to demonstrate an individual sports fundamental when passing by a play group. Brief sandlot team practices would be lead, with breaks to do paperwork, by the center supervisor. We mainly learned to play by copying the actions of older, more experienced players. Watchful, involved staff presented intramural leagues, or “big” games with other sites, as necessary, to keep us interested in healthy activities.**

**The reward in my career -- the true satisfaction I derived -- grew from being of service. Volunteering started at age 12, as I carefully studied every move the staff made. My first real job in recreation began at age 16. I was hired in the area where I had grown up. Familiarity with the neighborhood, four years of volunteer service, and a love of the activities as a participant were all important factors in my success as a program presenter. This type of hiring practice, where a volunteer is groomed for a part time "aide" position in the recreation program they know, helps bring associates of the new employee into the recreation center. The resulting play groups build in a very natural way.**

**Participant, group leader, volunteer, part time and full time employee, I never looked back! I cleaned a great many toilets, painted out a ton of graffiti, got jumped four times, saved a couple of lives, and kept thousands occupied in wholesome endeavors. I learned my job in the best possible way: By living through every level of use and service.**

**I attended a recreation society seminar where I learned that playground staffing began in Europe to keep diverse groups of children, including immigrants, from running wild on city streets, or being seduced by the wrong kinds of activities. By 1900, virtuous role models were being placed in American parks to keep our youth appropriately occupied. It had been discovered that unsupervised playgrounds became dominated by older boys who tended to promote inappropriate things to do.**

**43 years of experience as a volunteer and employee at public parks showed me that success follows intention. I was carried and protected by the courage of that conviction. Watching professional staff, I came to believe that "nothing truly bad could happen at the recreation center." This was my starting point as I offered lively diversions, or simply the chance to join in, while displaying empathy for group and individual's needs. We gave as many people as possible a wonderful ongoing leisure time experience. It does not depend on money. You only need the staff in place to be "for real." They must honestly supply ongoing interactive leadership to all patrons. Friendly smiles, easily given, must be proven trustworthy. Forthcoming -- self assured -- staff demeanor casts an aura of safety, and eventually earns good will.**

**I did have fun as a patron, and then as an understanding provider of a place to find a friend, or play safely. Latch key children, the only child, or perhaps someone new to the area, were all glad to accept little challenges as a way to join in. I did what was necessary to keep patrons interested in what was available: I might have to offer someone a game of ping pong, or I would find myself teaching the game to an individual so they could get a start playing. Calling everyone by name, and including them, helps build the fun. We used simple ladder or single elimination tournaments with token weekly prizes, such as a donated soda, as an excuse to post names. Our contests were valuable as social mixers. When you help clients choose “park user” as part of their identity, you have enhanced a healthy lifestyle. Some of these kids remember you for a lifetime. They are so excited to meet you years later! You hear a well adjusted adult say “You believed in me until I could believe in myself,” and you feel immense pride in a meaningful life well spent: A priceless reward!**

**At times it was exhausting trying to keep busy on behalf of every patron, but it was not “rocket science.” Any properly motivated 9<sup>th</sup> grader could perform all of my supervisory paperwork at many of the recreation areas I worked. Politics, employee supervision, and useful programming, however, must be addressed by a calm adult who is happy to be there. I always found lots of free time in my 8 hour shift to learn names and invite participation in a simple craft, seasonal sports, or my humble “special events.” I was certainly glad to see the patrons. In an idyllic way, my recreation centers felt like “home.” My success was based on a conscious effort to carry the happy times created for me as a patron where ever I went throughout my career, and it worked!**

**A handful of large sites offer more than independent contractors providing fee based programming for the “fortunate” few. Heavy rental usage may include changing field configurations, adult sports leagues, and large fitness rooms. Complex use patterns make that park’s busy supervisor a pure administrator. There are probably five to ten such areas in every major recreation department where the front line supervisor must expend a great deal of time and energy directing employees, doing business math, and optimizing their site use schedule.**

**Busy directors of very large parks can only supervise their staff to see that the work gets done. These few must be secretaries. They honestly have little time for operating program on behalf of the individuals who came to their park hoping to find something to do.**

**You can be certain that those individuals in need of supervision do keep coming to these Taj Mahals of public recreation. Indeed, some children have been pushed out of cars at the curb of at least one big recreation center by parent/caregivers who are “just too busy.” Dominant older youngsters typically entertain themselves at the expense of the smaller, weaker, or younger children in this group that literally “hangs around” the edge.**

**It would be completely unfair to paint the very busy site supervisors at large, active recreation areas as uncaring. Indeed, they often have the best annual family celebrations. These capable administrators also find a way to present movies “on the green” outdoors during warm Summer evenings for everyone in the neighborhood to enjoy. They simply are among a small minority of front line supervisors who lack the time to design, produce, and present guided experiences for all who arrive in need of direction at their public area.**

**One large area was blessed with a second in command employee who became legendary for keeping all who arrived out of trouble and appropriately occupied. This friendly, self-assured individual loved the work. Patrons got respect. We never had to pay any youth team fees.**

**My long, careful interactive study of public recreation revealed a golden age. Certainly from 1880 to 1960 it was known that active supervision of public sites -- free of charge -- was a safety issue. Recreation programs definitely do facilitate civics. Young folks learn citizenship by sharing, taking turns, and enjoying each other’s company in the context of sports and activities. People need to be part of a group. Consistent recreation programming offers community members a chance to look forward to something, and we all crave a sequence. Such chances are dwindling.**

## **RETURN TO A SERVICE PERSPECTIVE**

**City parks are now often staffed by a maintenance worker and a recreation person. The lone recreation person may be working full time, and so is wasted as a “supervisor” who is there to “see that the work gets done,” since there is often no other recreation staff! Instead of “Supervisor,” the lead recreation worker ought to be designated as “Park Use Specialist,” or “Lead Program Operator.” They could still have part time staff assigned as “Recreation Assistants.” Management level employees could supervise more than one Maintenance Worker and Recreation Staff Member at several parks in their span of control. Simply by changing employee titles, the chain of command can eliminate unproductive positions in order to re-interview existing staff for optimum placement with enhanced responsibilities.**

**This redefined format is sufficient to support a new golden age of recreation program design, production, and presentation including some free of charge activity for park patrons who need leadership. Park funding need not be increased.**

**Current recreation supervisors who rationalize that greater funding is necessary in order for them to see that others provide interactive service in the parks they operate can be transferred to “see the work get done” in more quantitative production environments. Some have found a home in landfill. Active program presentation, like police calls for service, or response to fire alarms, has already been paid for through taxation. Consistently acting to optimize recreation facility use for all park patrons regardless of their ability to pay must be defined as the fundamental element in recreation staff job descriptions.**

**The simple nature of extremely low cost activities and sandlot sports must never detract from, or complete with, any lucrative rentals or successful programs already in place. Keeping everyone involved limits bad behavior, and trains perspective new renters. Involved park users often become helpful in program presentation. One experienced staff member is needed to guide safe park usage for all patrons.**



## **SOLUTION OR DISSOLUTION**

**In the new millennium, America's parks and playgrounds are challenged as never before. With permitted usage at all time highs, recreation areas are closing. Tax revenues must be used to enhance public safety. Recreation programs have got to be seen as crucial.**

**Diverse groups of potential park users -- unguided by a responsible group leader -- have used their energy and creativity to invent public "swarming" attacks on helpless individuals, use drugs, seek sex, carry increasingly powerful weapons, "tag" a territory, and organize on their own. Some die or are maimed. Some get incarcerated. Lost futures, and wasted public money as young folks "go through" our legal system, represent a huge social and financial expense. Recreation departments can choose to offer alternatives to this squandered potential, or at least keep defenseless patrons relatively safe. The last chance to make a difference in the civic well being of your entire community is at hand!**

**Ever increasing numbers of gang members, indigents of all ages, "at risk" youth, and traditionally motivated patrons, come through your park. They bring conflict, their personal needs, stolen goods to trade for drugs, tricked out vehicles, their children, and sometimes even a picnic lunch. It is time for recreation professionals to get busy, and inclusive, so everyone at their park can choose a healthy lifestyle.**

**I asked a street fighter why he regularly engaged in gang fights. He shrugged with a smile, saying: "Something to do." I offered his "set" safe alternative pastimes as we took gunfire, modeled a drug free lifestyle in the face of rampant usage, and created events for potential combatants to peacefully meet. I was unwilling to spend my work day in an office waiting for park users to pay for programs.**

**Protecting neighborhoods -- by leading wholesome activities for all park patrons -- is the only relevance for Recreation Parks Departments. Encouraging participation in recreation bolsters main stream society.**

**We have placed parks and public areas in communities since time immemorial. Attendants clean the site, then regulate and guide activity to safely include all interested attendees. Staff does not entertain, they optimize utilization. This unique, inexpensive layer of infrastructure promotes social conscience as it provides civic assimilation by offering everyone positive choices. Keeping parks staffed and serviceable will require hard choices. Looming budget cuts hopefully will flatten administrative pyramids before eliminating lower cost employees who actually provide useful service through their direct efforts.**

**Public areas are crucial to your neighbors who do not buy a new car very often, or fly to their vacation destinations. Their “spa,” and travel destination, is often the park. Given unique demographics, the physical layout, neighborhood economics, and surrounding geography, each park will have a different number of potential patrons entering to seek free play, or in need of guidance.**

**Roughly half of the free play participants know why they came to your location. They may need a ball, or perhaps just the space to use the equipment they brought. Maybe they have a frisbee and a dog, a kite, tennis racquet, wheeled vehicle, or a toddler. All the renters know why they arrived. The other half of your public park patrons need some level of direction by staff, because they often only bring -- perhaps quite innocently -- their energy and curiosity.**

**They brought only energy and curiosity to a park placed by society for their use. Do these park patrons merit being welcomed? By name? Does recreation staff have the ongoing responsibility to foster correct usage of their assigned area? Is it reasonable to expect staff to invite individuals to form play groups that encourage recurring -- satisfying -- usage of the park site by all members of the public? Is the conduct of healthful leisure time activities mere entertainment, or the ultimate purpose for which these expensive public parks and recreation centers are provided, staffed, and maintained?**

**Staff is urged to consider the patrons as CLIENTEL. Some are paying, some simply arrive. Ask them what kind of time they had at the park.**

**Municipal recreation has become two faced: Outstanding free athletics, camps, and pastimes are provided in low income or high crime areas. Then suburbia is left to fend for itself, so that upscale neighborhoods have exceptional fee based program, and “middle class” areas languish. The silent majority of latch key, or at risk, children live where heads of households “should” pay for activities.**

**This philosophy is the armor bureaucrats wear at Council meetings or budget planning sessions. The “sins” of forgetfulness, selfishness, bad money management, laziness, exhaustion, bad luck, or border line poverty in the parents/caregivers are visited on their children: Nothing to do after school, or in the early evening, at their local public park. That is, unless on site recreation professionals find it within themselves to keep all potential participants involved in correct usage of their area.**

**Do any not deserve a “meet and greet?” This includes asking the tough looking folks what their intention is in coming to the park. Which individuals deserve to be ignored? People “act up” to get attention. Everyone wishes that something enjoyable would occur. Have you studied the demographics of your local area to understand the cultural milieu? Is there a sport in season that any patrons could get excited about? Have you given much thought to what activities should be possible? If so, you would be able to begin serving the interests of you total clientele -- in simple ways -- regardless of their ability to pay.**

**Some recreation “professionals” seek to insulate themselves from the scrutiny, criticism, and pressure of coaching or refereeing sandlot sports by promoting fee based recreation leagues. Low paid piece workers are used to present the season’s play, and take the blame. Staff provides only the venue. The prevailing “fund raiser” mentality holds that nothing can happen without a big budget. You see fees over \$100.00 for a child to play 10 youth basketball games. Staff tries to step back while making a profit. They protect their image by “never risking a negative.” Complaints to managers when a team falters will not affect them. And why promote free activities if management mandates fee based experiences? That hopscotch contest, while possible, is just extra work. If such productions do not lead to promotion, why bother?**

**As a new recreation employee in 1966, I did not realize our dissolution had begun. When I worked the Regional Marbles Tournament, with the Mayor presiding, I did not know it would be the last one. I never heard until much later that our Regional Hopscotch Championships had been discontinued in the early 1960's because of too much fussing about who had stepped over the line. The youth sand lot sports I had come up in were still flourishing at more than 150 locations. Gangs were a small problem, in part because we were an effective alternative to the street. My department won a national award at an apex of prestige resulting from sixty years of tradition, and service to all.**

**But track meets were the next casualty. They were labor intensive for a day, and the same team had won for several years. It was "just not fair" to all the other kids how much pride a lady took (a volunteer!) in developing her neighborhood team -- so it was gone.**

**Then over a hundred playground operations were summarily closed. It saved a quarter million dollars per year at the beginning of the 1980's. Youth could still find very affordable, or free, sand lot sports and special events if they could get to a recreation center. But many of those without special gifts or good fortune, on balance, were less often invited to safely play near their home. Gang membership grew steadily: Active young people will always search for ways to test themselves with some kind of challenge. It is natural to seek a fulfilling triumph. *If no satisfying things to do are presented, they will be invented!***

**By the early 1990's my patrons included the children of gang members. Police were tracking over a hundred gangs locally, with a few thousand members. My up and coming colleagues were verbally indoctrinated that "entry into any of our recreation programs ought to require a fee," although one of our beloved directors told me that fee base programs "worked only in neighborhoods where such fees were affordable."**

**That was really "no problem" for elected officials, because directly impacted individuals were usually too young to vote. Even though our sites got fast new computers with spread sheets and E-mail, recreation supervisors were now "too busy with paperwork" to present programs.**

**Then, when only one recreation staff member per site was budgeted, parks often got very quiet in the new millennium. Some of us remembered, and kept working as hard as we were allowed, but the die was cast. A legendary leader who had risen to upper management was very frank with me in the late 1990's, saying: "The job is paperwork, and...attendance is not a true measure of the worth of your programs."**

**We had become mere functionaries with plausible deniability: My area is short staffed, and "I am too busy supervising" to offer activities. It was tough to hear from an old pal high in the chain of command that staff operated program: "Is not where it's at in Recreation." There was no reason to extend one's self beyond recording area reservations, especially since doing so did not much impress appointing authorities at promotion time. Of course, "good with kids" had long been a "kiss of death" tag. The dour, organized, "no surprises" types were collecting fees, keeping elegant records, and getting promoted. Business as usual began to include park closures.**

**Recreation departments are starting to dissolve. Roughly 12% of the remaining recreation centers in my city have been threatened with closure near the end of the first decade in the new century. "Lack of programs," said the Mayor. Roving bands of teens attack individuals with blunt trauma weapons now from Florida to British Columbia, Canada. Los Angeles reports open gang and race warfare. A kind of modern dark ages is falling over some public recreation venues -- most quickly over the ones we abandon! We see pit bulls on short cloth leashes, and rule by the cruelest fear based pecking order of raw power. Some areas may soon be unsafe for transients, young prostitutes, thieves and their fence. Pushers and users will probably survive under the protection of gangs.**

**Our only solution is the reintroduction of activities for whole family groups, and afternoon/weekend programming for our youth. Free organization of simple play opportunities to get something going is critical. Recreation grew by being reliably inclusive. Staff must now reinvigorate their vital role. The light at the end of the tunnel has been extinguished: Time to do it better if we wish to keep doing it at all.**

## **MILLION DOLLAR ANTI-GANG STUDY -- FREE**

**Current public recreation budgets are sufficient to support the primary function of the profession. A skeleton crew of proactive staff can still go forth among park populations in the name of safety. Parks are cleaned -- free of broken glass, syringes, graffiti, blood and bodily fluids -- when young folks arrive to see “what’s up.” Fences are mended and trip hazards fixed. Patrons reasonably expect a safe play experience.**

**Young folks exploring their neighborhood in the afternoon or evening may stop by the park. Entry is free. People are doing all sorts of interesting things there, which invites interaction. This is the child’s Eden, and a performer’s stage. Energetic individuals show off. They are finding ways to compete in this romantic setting full of human drama. There is no way to halt that drama. People arrive to collect their thoughts, fall in love, or fall asleep. “All the world’s a stage,” especially public parks. A thoughtful staff member can use wisdom and creativity to fairly promote safe challenges and benign interactions, while acting as the eyes and ears of other city departments. Good citizens -- lawfully sharing the park as they “entertain” each other in a pleasant common sense manner -- is the work product of involved staff.**

**Thus we join with the “holy name places,” the libraries, and schools as touchstones in our civic landscape. Open as vacant lot, your municipal playground is the arena where each one in turn can be the “star” for a day -- may have “their moment.” The leader is seeking interaction with all participants. Individuals are valued, accepted, and honored for their contribution, while finding a priceless connection with the rest of polite society.**

**A place is provided so people can choose to engage in good acts, use up energy safely, feel satisfaction, and develop self-assurance in a cost effective way. There are still recreation staffers who know the value of active playgrounds. In one town, police can take youngsters to the recreation program instead of jail -- depending on the offense -- and they have “Recreation/Police Scholarship Application” forms available.**

**In these days of increasing gang membership/violence, every employee in contact with the public is at war on behalf of our young folk's hearts and minds. Recreation staff may well be there when people in their formative years make life decisions. We are "in charge," without much formal authority, as patrons arrive by choice "looking for something." Our power to make a difference is multiplied when they ask us our opinion about what they ought to do. Simple goal setting replies like "stay in school," and the assurance that hard work leads to success, sometimes makes the difference when coming from more of a friend. Youngsters, seeking my opinion, asked if I thought they could achieve success in education, the military, or the workplace. I showed respect and honest interest in their goals. Yes, I always said, they could claim, with persistence and determination, their piece of the American Dream.**

**Taking an interest in people's endeavors, while celebrating their successes, is community support. When recreation leaders lead they provide an illustration of well adjusted adult behavior. Program operation becomes the mentoring example. Staff, applying common sense to keep programs happening, shares a model for maintaining normalcy. Recreation leaders display life strategies by reacting to developing situations with a sense of right and wrong. Goal setting, integrity, flexibility, and striving are exemplary behaviors that leaders use to grow programs. The product is mutually respectful patrons entertaining each other in safety.**

**Police officers made interesting comments about parks and patrons to me over the years: 1) "Don't bother telling me an individual patron's story," because "It's always the same story." 2) The park has to be open. 3) The park has to be clean. 4) A very serious detective stopped what he was doing to thank a group of recreation people for the guidance he had received coming up at one of our recreation centers. The programs and helpful staff were vividly and specifically remembered. "They got me through," he said.**

**We gave that fine man dignity, and a haven from some uniquely tough streets. Guidance in his recreation experience grew from interactions, opportunities, and responsibilities leaders gave their group members.**

**Recreation uniquely offers the choice to join in leisure time activities. You plant a seed of hope when you see the good, in everyone, and believe in their ability to take part. You know they can have a good day. Then you are glad they did as you invite them to return. They have had an experience: made something or met a challenge, and used up extra energy in a healthful way. A city approved experience has left the park user satisfied, and heading home with “re-created” frame of mind.**

**Owners of a bass boat or set of golf clubs will understand. Filling the spaces between our required responsibilities with healthy diversions can invigorate and renew our spirit. Accessible, active program operation at public recreation areas has proven valuable to individuals for generations. Gang members are sometimes characterized as a “crime family.” Most families are wonderful. There is a “family” of park users at well run operations. We all need some kind of family.**

**I know captivating teachers (a great source of craft project ideas) with magical ability to inspire youngsters for one to five and one half hours a day on school days. Some of them inspire their captive audience beyond belief, and then the school day ends, usually before 3:00 PM. Police are in the business of fighting crime. When they learn a youngster’s name it is often too late to offer guidance if they had the time. Social workers, clerics, and overworked parent/guardians can offer hopeful advice, but active youth seeks captivating experiences: Nobody seeks diversion, indoctrination, or well meaning lectures. Advice -- most don’t need it and the rest won’t heed it -- cannot replace the kinds of experiences endemic in recreation programs. Key elements are active leadership, and easily accessible locations that all can reach without an automobile.**

**We held a “picture with caption” contest. The 4 year old drew a child and parent playing, with the caption “If I was President, parents would play with their kids every Saturday.” Sandlot games can bring kids and some parents to the park Saturday mornings. Keep it going till lunch, and someone might bring a picnic. Can you make the experience relevant so attendance will build? If you already have a whistle and a ball, must there be a fee? Are you sure everyone has been invited? Are you glad they came? As families use parks, bad actors are driven out.**



**The district attorney who joined our volunteer public recreation council of behalf of local youth sports made two points at our meetings: When the park is filled with good people -- including families -- criminal behavior shrinks back from wholesome groups. He also wanted our hours of operation extended into the evening so teens would have a safe place to gather and use their energy. Plea bargaining duties had shown him that our town lacked such opportunities. He made the specific point that a strong program of evening activities was an effective alternative to the street for energetic teens. Directing activity for those arriving without purpose or entry fees keeps parks usable for everyone.**

**These truths are anecdotal, but time honored. Recreation work is inspirational, and yields qualitative results. Park staff sees empirical evidence of personal growth among “at risk” youngsters as they looked forward to simple interactions week in and week out, with the “big game” most Saturday mornings. All the little competitions, that were only vital in the moment they occurred, focused attention. Patrons used watchfulness and developed problem solving skills in their attempts to persevere in crafts, sports, and “events.” It is hard to quantify, yet easy to see, a sense of community develop at a park where regular attendees are entertained by the efforts of their real friends.**

**The Police Athletic League believes that early positive contact with officers yields greater respect for authority in ensuing interactions. I had great luck inviting uniformed officers to participate with children at my family events. It was hard to tell who enjoyed the moment more: The smiling officer’s genuine enjoyment was obvious, as was the fun of very happy little kids, while adults were beaming as they looked on.**

**When a young person is arrested, local costs of their journey through the legal system easily top \$50,000.00. Each. This is paid for by City and County taxes. A robust diversion program, like active public recreation, that keeps youth out of jail is cost effective. This is a true high dollar value benefit even before you take into account the value to the individual who is helped to become a contributing member of society. All neighborhoods qualify for this investment to keep the back seats of police cars empty.**

**Observational evidence for the worth of free recreation programs -- what I saw over the decades -- is that they are consistently good for regular park users. Distance from home to an available recreation area was the big limitation to ongoing attendance. Children living near programs use them more often than those living farther away. Youngsters I worked with rarely lived more than four miles from the site. Generally, it is hard for them to cross large busy roads to go to a playground.**

**Looking back, the lawns, decomposed granite, black top, and hardwood were a kind of gentle crucible that burnished many fine members of our society. I saw three become sheriffs, and one, a big city beat cop. Two graduated from Annapolis. Two played pro sports, and two joined the Marines. As the years pass I see some in retail, the trades, and civil service. That street fighter became a proud airport baggage handler. My example of a well adjusted adult enjoying simple activities -- life -- seems to have served many individuals quite well. So many profited from the stage we provided for friendships to occur. Cherished memories abound: A landscaper waxes poetic -- to this day -- about his near “no hitter” in a game of “strike out” against his friend who went on to play professional baseball. After cleaning parks all day, this fine public servant volunteers to groom fields at “his” youth baseball fields where he played as a boy.**

**Recreation programs are uniquely free in many ways. Patrons come and go as they please. They pick and choose to participate in activities created for them. Drop-in programs are a free form venue where participants guide their own experience. They take responsibility to negotiate rules, and work to shape their interactions. The mindset of professional recreation employees is to evoke responses of correct, shared usage in patrons so that they become able -- and eager -- to keep each other occupied. Over time, thoughtfully guided patrons become self sufficient at the public area. They become volunteers, renters, employees, or members of the volunteer recreation board. They often cherish and support the endeavor of public recreation which “gave so much” to each of them simply by inviting them to join in.**

## **CITY HALL -- WITH ALL DUE RESPECT**

**Where, in any bequest of land or park dedication decree, is there a mention of public usage for a fee? Posted hours of operation suggest no fees. In fact, when indigent parent/caregivers have demanded that their children participate in low cost activities offered to public park play groups, those demands are always met! From across the American political spectrum we hear “It takes a village”...to ensure that “No child is left behind.” Public recreation’s portion is the inclusion of all who come to share activity in each park. \_**

**Proactive public recreation is not a societal panacea. Closing public parks, however, does open Pandora’s Box! Shady lawns devolve into homeless habitats. Park closures foster vandalism and crime.**

**Your recreation department may be mired in a bunker mentality. The RED FLAG is a site supervisor sitting comfortably in the office at an expensively manicured, incredible valuable property with only transients and a few other tough looking individuals lounging under the trees. Why allow public parks to become homeless habitats, “needle parks,” or a place to find prostitutes? How does this enhance the tax base, or protect neighborhoods? Besides eliminating families, making parks unpalatable for the innocent increases calls for service to the PD.**

**Such parks are safe for renters engaged in large activities. Players in adult sports leagues, as well as rooms full of participants in dance, crafts, or exercise come and go as a group. A politician will state at budget time “Park service touches people’s lives.” but what does that mean? A clean public rest room? A beautiful park setting? Is it enough to have a passive watcher in the park building office waiting to collect fees, open a door, or refill tissue dispensers? There is no reason to engage in the polite fantasy of Recreation “Directors,” or Recreation “Leaders” if none of them are in fact directing or leading.**

**Are the public recreation areas in your town seen as a cash cow, like parking meters? Is their value based on “general fund” contributions?**

**Few recreation departments can be squeezed very effectively for cash. You may have a tea garden or restaurant in a central park, or carriage rides that can be franchised, but those are exceptional cases. A nice outdoor warm weather picnic venue might take 100 reservations per year, which yields a very few thousand dollars. Room and gymnasium rental fees do little more than break even when you factor the cost of staff and utilities. Scouts, A-groups, and children's dance do not pay much to use meeting rooms. A recreation center may get some banquets and Adult League rentals, but again the monies are in the thousands, even department wide. Seen as a "rental," community centers earn little while serving relatively few, and yet they are often operated on that basis. If this is indeed what the public and elected officials want for public parks it can be done far more efficiently.**

**The logical course is to turn the office into a break room for beat cops. A clerical cashier can handle fee collection, record usage dates, and write receipts. This covers every function at the rental park except maintenance. One manager could supervise caretakers, cashiers, and part time staff to be present as necessary, at several locations. Field usage might involve turning on lights and opening an outdoor rest room, with no "leader" needed except at the beginning and end of the games. Cashiers could service more than one recreation area, with the days and times of available rental service posted at each site. Lower Management would still be available for "special occasion/situation" type discussions. Park availability and scheduling could be on the web.**

**Only a few questions remain: What kind of fun can I expect to have in the public park if I did not bring money? I entered at my own risk, and am not sure how to use the park facilities -- will someone help me? Will I be offered anything to do? Is there any promotion of civility between park patrons? Finally, is it worth keeping youngsters out of jail?**

**Politicians allocating funds for safety departments know deep down how the money will be spent: Police answer calls. Fire fighters put out fires -- lifeguards save lives. Do politicians honor and assess the value of "park and rec" services the way they do for our finest and bravest civil service employees? Demand enthusiastic outreach.**

**There is at least one luminary at your City Hall who kept “fifty kids busy all Summer with one worn out ball” while putting themselves through school. This is your “in house” expert. They know good outreach at the park when they see it. Be sure to institute what they identify as necessary. Stress that only operations which enhance public safety are worthy of continued funding.**

**Actually, we all know it when we see it. There certainly are recreation workers who bring idealism and energy to work. They provide attention and support to all their patrons. They are leaders who see possibilities. They bring people together, creating a groundswell of activity, events, and volunteerism. It breeds the kind of busy park usage that drives the shady characters away. Find the employees who run simple events, carefully present sandlot sports, and keep picnic areas pristine. Involved recreation providers are valuable to your town, because as wholesome groups and families are enticed into regular park usage, “turf” is reclaimed for taxpayers. That is priceless!**

**Physically active staffers promoting simple interactions are certainly not psychologists or counselors. You only need a consistent presence, someone who will remain poised while dealing with the public. The job is learned intuitively with thoughtful motivation and guidance from experienced managers. Veterans of military service would be perfect recreation leader candidates -- they have proven ability to stay calm and make decisions in the clear light of common sense. Great leaders can promote to many different careers in civil service from the entry level classifications in park service.**

**No extra funding, new task forces, or “czars” need be created. A sea change in the culture of recreation staff is needed from the top down. They must replace the excuse of “why programs fail” with an evolving sense of what was learned, and what is possible. They have to stay in process instead of retreating to the office to develop a rationale for continued shrinkage. This kind of institutionalized impotence has cost modern departments their enthusiasm. Require that actual recreation leaders move to the middle of park populations, and remain there. Insistent oversight from your august level is a tremendous help.**

**When elected officials attend culminating activities, and sandlot “play-offs,” they bring considerable validation to the endeavors of everyday people. Incumbents can do a lot of cost effective grass roots networking at such events. Recreation department staff will benefit from your example of active listening. Instruct recreation employees to “find a way to say yes” to those good folks in attendance. Your presence reaffirms societal core values by honoring constituent’s efforts.**

**Unclassified department heads will postulate that “new” service requirements need increased budgeting. Bless their hearts, they are savvy empire builders. Any of your departments heads would argue for a salary increase as their operations expand. When will elected officials learn to offer a 5 or 10 percent increase to department heads who shrink their payroll by that same 5 or 10 percent?**

**Define required service locations as you mandate efficiency. Insure staffing at all community centers, and sufficient athletic areas so that people in every part of town have roughly equivalent access on foot or by bicycle to public recreation programs. Areas with buildings or lighted fields must operate on behalf of the entire public at least 54 hours per week. Playing fields that lack lighting may be staffed 40 hours per week. Each of these locations requires a site supervisor and one or two direct report part time assistants. Subordinate staff can serve at more than one location. They can be kept at 19 or fewer hours of work per week, a part time position.**

**Aldermen and mayors can identify worthy staff for promotion in areas they know well. Do not let bureaucrats overly codify service by quantifying hours/activities/results to pressurized staff. Qualitative results over a season of adjustments to each unique area will provide a viable track record which can be useful in moving and retaining staff. For example, an area may take time to grow “visible” program through grass roots effort. Take an interest, but be patient.**

**Then urge cuts in analysts, assistant directors, and bean counters. Competent directors need no assistants. There are few beans to count!**

**Like your museums and art galleries, the parks are already in place. We think nothing of placing attendants at these other public buildings to insure correct usage, conserve valuable property, and keep everyone safe. Parks are no different: Correct patron interaction and facility usage is not a given, and must be supervised actively. Optimum park use requires patron guidance.**

**On site recreation personnel, usually one individual now working an afternoon/evening shift, must model how patrons are expected to behave toward each other. Public trust comes as staff realistically uses hope, aspiration, and positive resolutions in their actions. The core change must be a proactive aspect to everything they do. A new generation of patrons yields renters and fee program supporters if they are lead through free basic activities, low organization sports, and fun special moments of participation. Unless City Hall keeps enough staff in action presenting a pantheon of simple chances to play and enjoy the company of fellow park patrons, we cannot develop a vibrant base of park users. Making tough decisions, and enacting reform, will yield the crucially needed result. Monitor, but do not micromanage, your staff.**

**Employers are looking for people with honesty, a trait good recreation personnel model for each other and the public. Responsible people are sought by the business world. Playgrounds offer many opportunities for patrons to take responsibility for simple elements of an activity, and thus they learn by doing. Respect is shown to all who come to public parks by good recreation staff. The model becomes an obvious starting point -- a basic requirement for sharing activities in a pleasant manner. Respect is key in the work-a-day world as well. Co-operation in the craft room, kitchen, or play area is a non negotiable safety issue. "We work together" as a matter of course in recreation to include everyone as we get through the day with the best possible result. Compassion is used by recreation staff to be sure all participants get an equal chance at the fun, and find the good in people's efforts at the park. An array of activities gives each individual a chance to win, or feel satisfaction at the end of an experience. These models and attributes transmit to those patrons in their formative years. Principles used at the park are equally important in commerce as they are in recreation.**

**The many pressures at City Hall divert resources from people to business and infrastructure just about every time. One City tried to fund recreation programs with a CDBG grant. Youth recreation ended up receiving \$10,000 out of a third of a million. The rest went to infrastructure and their safety departments. Summer camps need help.**

**A park's maintenance workers are expected to keep busy cleaning. When inclement weather keeps them inside, we use a codified hierarchy of tasks for them to perform once the building is totally clean: Clean the work room. Clean the tools. Check public restrooms repeatedly.**

**Now, please focus a similar onus on recreation site leaders who meet the public. Present a game. Present a simple craft or cooking experience. Start a penny drive to pay for it. Show a video. Teach a youngster a skill. Plan more events for tomorrow. Maintain an ongoing effort to keep those who found your location occupied. Motivate those people to bring their friends. Your current recreation department owes taxpayers an inviting park where good things may reasonably be expected to happen. You are paying them to be there. Demanding guidance in the proper utilization of public recreation facilities for all who arrive using only existing resources can become your primary requirement for the retention of an unclassified Department Director. Make it their goal!**

**As City Hall makes active public service an imperative part of the basic departmental mission of Parks and Recreation, the community wins. Requiring site supervisors to keep busy on behalf of all park patrons will preserve the profession and the vital service it can provide.**

**Replacing the caring human presence of an active recreation professional with emergency call boxes, or surveillance cameras, is impossible. Many enticing new technologies are brought before you at budget time. A computer keystroke can now program ball field lights to come on at a distant location after they have been rented on line with a credit card. City safety departments use new technologies to free up increasingly valuable employees so they can focus on the performance of vital functions. Please make sure your parks system does the same.**



## **PUBLIC RECREATION MANAGEMENT**

**Public recreation must renew a century long tradition of service by offering simple things elegantly. Fine tune the park experience for all who arrive, or sit back and wait for lay-offs! When a recreation operation is shut down, management has failed to see that useful work on behalf of the public was getting done. Multiple public recreation area closures indicate systemic failure.**

**We waste energy and creativity rationalizing that nothing can be done without increased funding or corporate sponsorship. There is always an excuse why not, and a reason to step away. Institutionalized passivity is counterproductive. “Helplessness” in the age of computers, and doing nothing to insure doing nothing wrong, leads to the ultimate question: Will the profession shrink until the last employee out the door turns off the lights, shrugs, and says “Well, at least I got mine?!”**

**A thriving park with free recreation programs almost certainly exists in the most economically disadvantaged part of your town. You call it a “security zone,” or an area needing “neighborhood protection.” This is the model for the rest of your operations department wide. Recreation leaders who move to the middle of park populations, and provide recreation service free of charge, will save the profession.**

**Old hands will cherish this attempt to enhance park service. New hires may question having to do “extra work.” With states and cities in the red, and no budget growth, there is but one answer if entrenched bureaucrats ask: “Why should I?” Tell them thoughtful outreach to each patron validates our profession through useful community service.**

**The mission is inclusion for all concerned, just as you learned in your diversity training. As patron needs are met citywide, your value will be obvious. In tough economic times the merit of your service is pivotal when budgets are made. Consider that street lights, sewers, and fire stations are placed and maintained where they are needed. Recreation departments must face the same test of worth.**

**As a retired site supervisor, my argument that promotions ought to be based on a successful track record of program presentation is at least no longer self serving. Candidates must be promoted who can become involved with the public, not “above” park users. Sensible outreach keeps patrons occupied as it provides a model for social interaction skills. Leaders are needed who can win or lose gracefully, and even enjoy a good laugh at their own expense, as they calmly set simple group limits: 1) It is only fun if everyone is laughing. 2) The toys are in the box -- people are not toys, so no having “fun” at another person’s expense. 3) Take turns and share. 4) Tell staff if you have a problem.**

**Hiring new staff members from among patrons who have come up loving playgrounds provides experienced leaders who have a feel for the next step in a program’s operation. This is important because each day is unique in our “ultimate” people business. Smart leaders know how to carry the moment on behalf of their group to keep the proper leisure time atmosphere. Such concepts are impossible to write in a job description or display in an appointing authority interview question. A candidate’s track record of program operation is paramount in demonstrating their usefulness to a public park, or the people they serve.**

**If appointing authorities make track record in program development, production, and presentation the key factor in selecting from among qualified candidates, the profession will survive. There are many clear eyed, energetic folks in the talent pool. Every one must be trained step by step in money handling/account procedures, site supervision, the discipline manual, and political savvy. When this basic training is neglected, or selectively revealed to “friends,” many staffers see the obvious, and just give up.**

**General training of all well qualified candidates, often accomplished through delegation in the course of normal park operation, can legally produce successful interview candidates who will actually serve the public. From among this pool you promote individuals who display the skill set, desire, integrity, and capacity to get out of the office and lead by example. You promote staff who can keep everyone involved.**

**If all potential qualified employees are properly trained in functionary operations, those with verbal ability, self-assurance, and creativity who honestly care deeply about the well being of patrons will naturally have the best track records. These are the people you promote if you want viable outreach, strong programs in those beautiful settings, and honest value received for all community members. Only candidates who like people -- staffers who look forward to each new human contact -- will provide the best level of service. Nurture your staff to view their work as a celebration of life to create useful Community Centers. Remember that taxpayers have paid for this service -- there is no further need to charge for simple activities.**

**Wiser minds than mine will have to determine how to codify goal setting and striving while defining acceptable achievement in program development and operation as elements of job performance. I did find one city where recreation staff were promoted based on the growth of their park attendance.**

**Once in all my years a fax came in from our state's professional recreation society urging public recreation leaders to act as counselors for our park's youngsters. Shortly after the fax came in, my immediate supervisor phoned up "out of the blue" to flatly state that we were not counselors! I agree in principle that all we can do is conduct straight forward activities for groups and individuals. I sent that manager the fax I had just received. We never spoke about it again. Another manager told me to wear a logo hat and whistle when coaching or playing in a game to keep youngsters occupied. The fear was that we must never be seen to play, or look like we were enjoying ourselves. It is pathological paranoia, but of course I wore the hat and whistle.**

**It is management's job to make the change to a service mentality necessary and fun. Give short trainings. Listen. Offer helpful strategy to achieve required programming. Demand constant public outreach in actual practice, job descriptions, one on one employee meetings, and performance evaluations. Celebrate employee successes in patron service by sharing all current workable strategies department wide. Model the practice of staying current, and on task, for the public good.**

**Role models can abound in the chain of command depending on the real goals of management. A mere holding action directed with a bunker mentality yields withering attrition. Operate with enthusiasm as you define the successful recreation career path as planning, promoting, and presenting free activities as necessary to keep parks safe and all inclusive. Move passive folks with well thought out rationales for their lack of program attendance to other departments. Keep salaries low.**

**As seasoned supervisors promote to jobs with greater compensation, you tirelessly seek “gifted rookies” fresh from military service, recently graduated recreation majors, or “home grown” participants who came through your park’s activities from the patron, volunteer, or part time employee classifications. Select passionate, energetic candidates, please.**

**Managers can only comment briefly that they hired the best candidate. Is it the person with all functionary skills who needs little training? Is it the candidate least likely to do anything out of the ordinary? Bottom line, is your new hire someone who allows the chain of command to relax, or the candidate you know will do the most on behalf of all park patrons? Is that how you got a couple of generations of “office sitters,” mere apologists who complete their forms while waiting for volunteers to take responsibility for program? The promotion of regular activities became passé in the 1980’s. Resuscitate your profession with active leadership at every level. Get the best enthusiastic programmers you can. Do not fear surprise, embrace it!**

**Active leaders join with regular patrons in a cycle of action, interaction, and reflection on the current state of shared simple activities. Together they gain enlightenment on what might be the best way to redirect energy and effort. Opportunities for action and interaction can give patrons a chance to strive, and must be designed to offer a reasonable hope of regular success. The natural by-products are satisfying experiences which can enhance a patron’s self image. Experienced managers suggest possible events. Variety in the presentation will help patrons find enjoyable endeavors, and take a turn at being the star. That is, if the staff really wants to present the activities. You cannot fake enthusiasm, commitment, or diligent oversight.**

**With site staff and their management team actively promoting simple, cost free events, individual locations will show successes and voids in response to specific activities. It is not at all important when an activity that has been promoted with honest zeal does not catch on at a recreation area: “It didn’t go.” The immediate question management then politely asks is: “Ok, what did you do instead.” Managers must remain interested in what is going on at each park. What is working? Use ongoing accountability to promote continuous striving. It will always go back to finding a leader with unique public relations proclivity who can function optimally as a recreation site supervisor.**

**I stood on the shoulders of some real giants in park program presentation. A craggy veteran smiled at the zealous over complication of my proposed calendar of events. His truth was that “You get four or five big things and four or five little things that the kids really enjoy, and they will ask to repeat them.” He was right. I learned to evolve activities from what worked to what might be enjoyable as a given play group progressed. Involved staff will cherish the steady influence of thoughtful management. Sadly, it has become chic to “manage” the negative perception of public recreation instead of eliminating such frustration through good works.**

**Promote from within the existing staff members of your department. Most police sergeants and fire captains come up from the entry level positions in their department. This practice yields knowledgeable staff in operations. More importantly, these folks know the nuance of the areas they will serve. Civil service interviews are comprised of three to five questions, which, to save our profession, might best resemble these:**

- 1) Describe your experience in conducting activities for youngsters age 7 to 14 after school, and on Saturday mornings.**
- 2) What evening and weekend activities have you presented for teens and young adults?**
- 3) What steps would you take at your recreation center to insure that active youths entering the area will use the facility safely?**
- 4) How would you develop a free program of activities for the public?**
- 5) How would you develop volunteers from among the individuals who attend the activities you present?**

**Civil service interview questions about resolving patron disputes arising from double booking, or over crowded areas may be acceptable. A long term problem is exacerbated when the bureaucratic culture parses questions toward the minutiae of unique cash handling policies or the specific steps in their department's discipline manual. It leads to chosen candidates being coached to recite impressive "civil service appropriate" phrases at the interview. The result is a homogenized labor force with agreeable, controllable employees. While a passive generation of clerks, mere "watchers," have occupied park offices, a generation of active youth has been lost. A tight knit group of employees arose who were often seen to chat on the phone with each other while the public was left to their own devices in the park.**

**Hiring shy, acquiescent bureaucrats can reduce public expectations. Less activity means fewer "problems" to be faced, and the elimination of most complaint phone calls. We were phenomenally capable people, but as my decades of service rolled on, we became a clubby kind of eating society. Many said the "right things," and rode the "gravy train." We survived, and any lack of attendance could be rationalized. Usefulness faded as we eschewed our greatest value to park patrons: Program operation.**

**Civil service hiring practices will never quantify traits like enthusiasm, poise, empathy, a forthcoming attitude, humility, creativity, or a sense of responsibility. The qualities of a valuable recreation site supervisor are just too subjective, even quixotic. As the Supreme Court Justice said, "I know it when I see it." Like valor under fire, the leader demonstrates their real worth as they provide activities that safely occupy the time and energy of all those who found their park site. The leisure time professional supplies opportunities to become inspired, or excel, or get involved in some action that might supply a satisfying catharsis to divert, and thereby refresh, our hardworking population.**

**The crucial moment comes to parks each day as paperwork is done, and patrons begin to arrive. Those in need of guidance can be the next generation of renters. The simple activities and sand lot teams mimic more involved, fee based presentations.**

**The philosophy of outreach and interaction -- learning everyone's name and why they came to the facility -- works when pursued by all levels of department staff. Ongoing benefits begin as park users respect active staff by promptly informing employees of broken glass, patrons in distress, leaks, spills, messes, odors and plugged toilets. Of course, these reports are always met with an energetic thank you! Everyone's job gets easier. As the staff strives to keep their park pristine it transmits to the public: Everyone puts their trash in the can. Staff appreciates and acknowledges the help. It is free to ask "how are you doing," or say "great to see you." Invitations to join in, as well as opportunities to help out, are obviously viable -- infectiously desirable -- when presented by a bright eyed, bustling, energetic employee. A bored, reticent, doubtful, or indifferent offering of activities will be meaningless.**

**There is no suggestion here that any civil servant be laid off or let go. Indeed, park supervisors are unsurpassed functionaries, cash handlers, and politicians. If they turn out not to be inclusive programmers, or multi-tasking activity presenters, and fail at consistently maximizing park site usage with growing groups of regular participants -- they may benefit from some other kind of posting.**

**Civil servants can use job searches, interdepartmental transfers, or the interview process to maximize their career potential through optimal placement given the skill set they do possess. There are "businesslike" functionaries on staff who would be more valuable in such repetitive production environments as sending out water bills, collecting fees, or supervising the land fills and recycling programs.**

**Reassign park supervisors who may never accept any sort of open ended challenge to be in process promoting activities. Those hiding in plain sight behind "paperwork," or grumblers who wonder exactly what they must do to get by, need more quantitative challenges.**

**Everything depends on your front line staff working tirelessly with the public. You, the middle and upper managers of public recreation, must buy in to activity based service. Reinvigoration, or extinction? If you allow shrinking staffs to sit in the office their vital role will be lost.**

**The only real risk is failure to become relevant to all of your community members. Since it takes a lot to show gross negligence, and employee misconduct is rare, there is no excuse not to contribute to everyone's health, safety, and quality of life. Truly beneficial services are funded. If real activity presenters are hired, all recreation "calls for service" will be answered.**

**Waiting for volunteers to present program -- instead of finding volunteers amidst the populations of programs you present -- is failed policy. Our wise Grants Administrator gladly found funding for open space supervisor's projects. These Rangers inspired volunteers by the example of their own hard work in Riparian Area Restorations and Trail Building projects. The best volunteers come and go, but the Rangers were known to follow through when necessary to finish the projects themselves. Funding Summer Camp with CDBG monies in very low income areas is wonderful: Active staff members must still set standards, lead, and provide stability -- even with generous grants.**

**Our finest areas sometimes sit like a wrapped toy in the store waiting to be paid for, and then used. Volunteers supply virtually all equipment and supervision for bat and ball games in the Spring, and at a few other times. Some public recreation employees do little more than their required paperwork. If renters want to operate "for profit" programs, they must be insured in your department's approved manner, and be self-sufficient. Staff supplies venues, checks proof of insurance, collects fees, and verifies that spaces are left clean at the end of each usage.**

**How does middle and upper management require front line supervisors to get up and get out of the office to interact with increasingly diverse and problematic patron populations -- for no extra money!?! After all, staff could get craft goop on their clothing, break a nail, or pull a muscle! If attendance is not a true measure of the value of your work product, it really does serve the wise upwardly mobile recreation professional best to create no excitement, and offer no free programs.**

**When they get the visit from managers above their level, the site is clean and quiet. Bulletin boards are clear except for approved posters.**



**The site supervisor greets the manager in an antiseptic setting. There is plenty of time for a quiet talk. The manager leaves impressed with the safety and cleanliness of the area. The site supervisor has been a good, agreeable listener.**

**Often these professionals have ONLY left out children whose parents have no time, money or interest in structuring their child's free time, and teens who are too old for fee based day camps, yet not ready for adult sports or "open" volleyball night. One or two employees remain on site. Between rentals they can offer simple, supervised civic experiences. They can learn names, arrange sandlot games, and plan special events -- or not.**

**Perhaps some neighborhoods, like some individuals, have special needs. Leaders might someday be placed based on their ability to connect with groups found at a given park. What if a neighborhood resident makes it their life's work to give their home area the best park anywhere? What could be better? That was my starting point. Then I was supervised by a world champion athlete who had done the same thing.**

**Outstanding Public Service must be founded in the primary job description: The employee will seek interaction with all park patrons to guide optimum park usage while modeling civic responsibility -- good citizenship -- and commonsense respect for the rights and property of every individual. As long as the track record of staff is measured by rising attendance and safe play opportunities presented for all who arrive, management has done all it can.**

**The best park director we ever had mused that his days in lower management were largely devoid of anything to do. My time at that level was spent creating a new sports league for our area. I got us exposure in print where none had been before. I could have done nothing along those lines and drawn the same pay simply by submitting correct payroll vouchers. I earned priceless personal satisfaction by enhancing our area's public service. If maintaining an image, doing the paperwork, and informing headquarters of developing situations is the entire job, park activity can -- often does -- grind to a halt.**

**I came up in programs operated by the recreation workers assigned to sites. It was simply their job to provide program. The dime for a movie or quarters collected for a craft project were kept in small burlap bank bags. By 1993 it was “no pay, no play.” In the new millennium we only took payment for programs provided by contractors. Lucky children still enjoy fee based experiences that are often quite wonderful. I’ll keep looking, but so far I have only found one free exciting program -- a martial arts class in a very tough neighborhood. Young folks there can prove themselves to staff instead of getting “jumped in” to a gang. We know that volunteers fade, so the only constant still in place from when I started over 40 years ago, is paid staff.**

**Fee based, and parent operated, programming offers many ways to support our free promotional activities. Hand me down catcher’s gear and used bats are a wonderful addition to Summer softball. Adult sports leagues sometimes donate worn balls to youth sports. Mandate that 10% of the profits from adult league fees, and for profit programs offered through recreation councils, be transferred to the host area’s “general fund.” “Petty cash” then funds craft supplies, implements of play, football “flags,” and scrimmage vests for sandlot games. Fee based programs have built in supervision, which frees public employees to offer alternative activity for the rest of their patrons.**

**Require staff to check messages, and make a “bank run” early in the afternoon. Then regular interaction with, and direction of, after school play groups makes your employees valuable to all park users. Staff checks communiqués after the youngsters finish their satisfying play experience. Multi-taskers, the only type of staff to keep, can break away from supervision briefly to schedule rental usage, or answer a question. This professional worker makes your department look great because they are busy, and thinking on their feet. They exhibit practical value to the community. Getting the functionary details correct while conducting ongoing site operation is a necessary “win/win.”**

**Waiting for things to get better never works. Grow. Reclaim a robust stature if you are an office denizen. Has enough of your department vanished to get your attention?**

**Without a spirit of striving innovation, our presentation has not been compelling to all who come through the parks. It became unimportant to imagine the possible, and reach out to patrons with anything they might enjoy. What manager can accept excuses as an acceptable work product? Businesslike bean counters must agree that it costs no more to be interested in patrons. Effort can be guided, suggestions made, and such free time as is available can be spent showing the next generation how to use their public recreation area. Hire a very few helpers for the truly busy site supervisors at large regional operations.**

**Of course, the “product” is so subjective that some park directors are able to rationalize failure time and time again. The “professional” with the calm, quiet park gets promoted. This is good! That individual often adds little to the site. They are masters at referring concerns to others who are not available, or explaining -- with elegant finality -- why your request is quite impossible. This award winning bureaucrat is detached, calm, and pleasant if you accept their rationale. They will smile warmly as you leave. The brief vignette is their entire persona: They wait for renters, vendors, service personnel, and only cultivate individuals who have the power to affect their career. A study in the perfunctory, they do nothing extra with gusto!**

**Do not reward your staff for sitting rested and ready in a beautiful park in case anyone figures out how to use it, and then forcing those customers jump through hoops for the privilege. This behavior is rationalized as having very high standards, and proceeding in a “businesslike way.” It is the opposite of “businesslike” to discourage normal use of your facility in any way. Good business practice is to flourish by serving, as much as possible, all patron needs. This creates “word of mouth” advertising, and gains community support.**

**Departments and managers who countenance statements like “there’s nothing to do,” or “we don’t have any one to run that program,” are negligent in allowing a priceless funded resource to lie fallow. When the front line supervisor says “I don’t know anything about 1) Crafts, or 2) Sports, or 3) [fill in the blank], TELL THEM THEY CAN LEARN. Make training available in 1 on 1’s, or “user friendly” clinics.**

**Management can promote proper service, but it must be rewarded to be maintained. When employees come to know that creating all inclusive programs, building attendance, and presenting lots of activities is the path to promotion, the problem will have been solved. Wise managers will ask: “How can I help you help the public?” They will proceed with style while modeling involvement and enthusiasm as they facilitate optimized park usage. When the entire chain of command in your recreation department cares actively that patrons are diligently guided into wholesome alternatives, safety is enhanced while spending no more money.**

**The hope is that managers will authorize, train and encourage staff to welcome after school arrivals with park use opportunities. An inviting two hour block of time follows the interests of these active patrons. The start time will vary depending on the public area’s proximity to schools.**

**On Mondays, be ready to practice the sport in season, finish craft projects, or promote low organization games. There may be a short day of instruction at local schools. This is the midweek day for intramural sports. Then on Fridays, play games into the evening. Most older free play users will be occupied socially, so this is the best teen sports night. Area wide leagues play Saturday mornings, and may include nearby sites with only enough players for one team. Find an evening during the week for teens to anticipate “their” event, such as volleyball or dance.**

**Retired folks may need an exercise space two or three times per week in the mornings. Use an empty room to host mahjong or bridge. People on fixed incomes meet new friends, or get rides to lunch. There is no reason to charge the very people for whom the buildings were placed.**

**The above suggestions leave supervisors working till closing up to four nights per week, and Saturdays. Shift organization can schedule an office hour to meet with renters before nightfall. Here a true recreation professional can check phone/fax messages, and execute permits with folks stopping by on their way home from work. Staff checks E-mail, and has a bite to eat. Program thus becomes more than patrolling the grounds yelling at the kids in the park to stop doing something wrong.**

## **RECREATION LEADER/SITE SUPERVISOR**

**Diligently acquit correct record keeping. Accurately apply approved account procedures, and faithfully adhere to all daily duties. Ask your supervisor how you may interact with those who need help to use your park the best they can. Learn departmental policy covering the presentation of free activities. Your service makes the difference.**

**My greatest wish is that you and your patrons find a wonderful sense of fulfillment, joy, and satisfaction from the time you share at the public recreation area. Seekers, poets, and adventurers ask: “Why are we here?” Recreation site workers know “we are there” to take care of each other -- within policy -- as we try to have the best time possible together -- given budgetary and operational constraints. What you do for yourself leaves the planet with you. What you do for others resonates through this world forever.**

**Be a friend to the park. As the “face” of the Recreation program, be the ambassador so everyone feels welcome. Extend your involvement, where needed and appreciated, to all persons in attendance. Internalize the well being of your site and patrons: You need what is best -- given possible options within policy -- as a matter of personal responsibility. A large part of your “work product“ is a safe and happy environment for human interaction. Only promise what you can deliver.**

**After taking care of your loved ones, you are in the correct work if you cannot wait to get to the park to see what will happen that day. Your sobriety is the key to finding joy in simple things. Everyone benefits when work is the “bright eyed, bushy tailed” leader’s “happy hour.”**

**Find power in the hopefulness of youth. All parents want a better shot for their kids. They will help if they see your efforts as worthy. The program will largely grow through the efforts of others as you learn to delegate, and imagine the best possible role in your presentations for all of those individuals open to your direction. You chart the course using every bit of public and staff input available.**

**Volunteers come up through activity participation. Occasionally a very involved parent/caregiver gives valuable help. These folks become true force multipliers as they buy in to your presentations. A few will even become employees. Nurture these delegates as long as they continue to grow in harmony with the foundational goal of enjoying the day with all who arrive. Volunteers who become unproductive or unhelpful must be gently returned to the status of cherished patron. New faces, even those brought in by trusted volunteers, bear close watching to protect them, and insure success. Keep high standards for everyone.**

**Write a thank you note to volunteers, and the supervisors of fellow employees who help you succeed. When thanking sworn personnel, include their badge number, and use the word “diligent” in your letter.**

**Learn and use everyone’s name. Let each one tell you their story. Draw patrons out by taking an honest interest in what they are saying. Listen carefully. Respectfully remember what you are being told. When they pause, ask a question to deepen your understanding. Shy folks may be helped by noticing something important to them, such as a ball cap, logo t-shirt, or whatever they are carrying. Complimenting a patron’s “pride item” may bring up a topic that they are eager to talk about. Be ready to jot down contact information, program ideas, and all details of fondly remembered past events at your location.**

**Use your computer, phone tree, interested community members, and your chain of command to create a palpable, living spirit of fun at your park. Correct park usage is portrayed by staff possessing typical moral values shared by local mature citizens. Heartfelt engagement to the nuance of each interpersonal contact makes the playground come alive.**

**Lead with your heart as you invite them all to join in your alternative to chaos or malaise. Having to cancel a program because no one could pay is not the fault of recreation staff. Failing to foster pick-up games or lead safe activities to use up the energy of curious, energetic patrons who have come to the park looking for fun is INEXCUSABLE. A moment arises when the group calmly looks at you wondering “what’s next?” Can you preside over enjoyable events to keep them happening?**

**You are the guide. Be fair as you set commonsense limits for their safety and protection. Your goal is that through the variety of events presented over a season, each of your park's regular users would have a chance to win -- each would have the experience of going home feeling like the "star." Individual capabilities must be taken into account as you constantly search for appropriate activities. Games need not be invented, but may have to be modified to fit the space available, and your unique clientele.**

**A career in recreation will force you to become a great politician! Your understanding of interpersonal situations will deepen. When you hear an assertion to which you cannot reply, "Yes, I agree," use another totally honest rejoinder, even nodding while you say "I understand." By keeping friends of the park close, and all other questionable individuals closer, you gather information to share discreetly with the PD. People who cannot say why they came to the park bear close watching. Park staff must know how to call the police, and what to say.**

**Avoid conflict as you routinely get as much contact information on all patrons as possible. Allowing picture ID to be used for equipment check-out may give staff the opportunity to photocopy a suspicious person's card. Let the toughs know "I'm not your problem, I'm on your side." Rhetoric like that could save you a beating. You must adhere to the law as you seek the best outcome for all of your patrons. Keep in mind that help is usually twenty minutes away.**

**Working in a particularly challenging area, I had occasion to save a teen from having his head beaten to mush on a sidewalk. The alcohol driven situation diffused rather quickly. The two seemed to be arguing over something important. I never knew what. In the following couple of days I repeatedly asked their group's members that if two men had a dispute, could they please take it elsewhere, because of the many mothers and babies in the park. Everyone knew they were welcome if they could be civilized, and respect neutral ground for the little ones, the parents, and the grandparents of the neighborhood. My outreach was calm and fair, so the reply was "That's pretty cool." Every person was respected. The goal remained acculturation through participation.**

**My gentle human engineering started there in my first work shift. I met a group of drug users around a picnic table right behind our building. I introduced myself with a smile, and invited them to move their party to a far corner table at the edge of the site. I drove by the police storefront on my way home, met the beat sergeant, and identified illegal activity in my area of responsibility. Inexorably, quietly, and safely we managed to eradicate all visible drug use and sales from the park. It took about seven months to give officers opportunities to “catch them in the act.”**

**Subsequently, a major event drew 2500 folks on a Saturday. I noticed three tough individuals, nice guys really, squatting under a small shade tree as they watched everything from the edge of the festivities. I nodded to them and asked a trusted recreation leader “Where is the rest of the gang?” He quietly replied, with a respectful smile “Locked up. You got ‘em all locked up.” He got “the look,” and smiled once more as he turned away. We never spoke of it again.**

**In two different parks I quickly let slip to obvious drug dealers that the grounds were being photographed “7-24.” For all I know it might have been true. One individual looked shocked, said “Thanks, man,” and then ran away never to be seen again.**

**Another time I walked up to a “posse” with a known drug dealer at it’s center. This guy came with a camera person, the story goes, so any violations of his civil rights could be recorded. Since some of them were in their 30’s, I naturally promoted my Summer youth camp for ages 5 to 12. I mentioned the hidden cameras, and added that “the plain clothes guys would be making sweeps soon.” Contact with very organized groups should be made briefly, and in passing. Keep moving, because your “armor” is nothing more than honest good will.**

**One of the men asserted “This is my neighborhood.” I nodded, saying “Yes, I know just how you feel,” as I proceeded past their table. Only one of them ever returned. I walked up smiling and asked what he came to do that night. He looked frustrated as he left. Later, a pleased Sergeant said officers would drive by more. Be sure to emphasize your vulnerability, and need to remain discreet, when dealing with the PD.**



**So when the park is clean, safe, and the paperwork is finished, you can GET TO WORK. Interact to foster correct facility usage. Find out what the group enjoys doing, and relax into familiar patterns. You can interject new concepts as Seasons change, to commemorate local or national holidays, or pick up on new pastimes entering the culture. Stay current, and keep it simple. Every patron and volunteer wants to take part in attractive adventures as best they can. Staff wants everyone looking forward to the next meeting. If you get a compliment, pass on the credit every time. You take responsibility for the tough problems.**

**Remember to keep your chain of command apprised of anything out of the ordinary. Management controls a fixed amount of capital, and, they hope, the department's public image. They appreciate "No Surprises." When upper management acknowledges your good works, be sure to thank them for their support. You will be glad you identified your success as a product of your co-workers, and supervisor's, helpfulness.**

**Use that rainy day. Finish projects, begin the new season's program, get a craft ready to share, or put up a new bulletin board. Do a big thing for your park every workday. Enjoy pursuing that goal.**

**Integrity, resourcefulness, and my department's sound principles were properly applied. I learned to copy the style of my immediate supervisor, as well as picking up desirable traits from those around me.**

**On the worksite you must know your people, and be a good custodian of supplies. At my first posting -- the youngest leader in charge -- I lost my own new football within 10 minutes of putting it into use. Eighteen years later I was playing with the children of my first playground's patrons when I heard from behind "We know who stole your football." When the laughter subsided I learned that an older youth, who I had immediately trusted completely, had stolen my property. I had simply failed to be as professional as I was friendly. I needed to follow proscribed check-out policies -- the same service my first coach had given me. A signed permission slip to approve participation, and allow equipment check-out, gives leaders the ability to identify patrons. Temper enthusiasm with wisdom. Constantly seek self-improvement.**

**I came to understand that when I picked up a required form, vendor invoice, regular payroll tasks, or other seatwork, it was best to finish what I started in one session. Put the finished copy in your supervisor's box, or fax, so you are fully done at that time. Save all faxes in and out in chronological order. Mark each one sent or received with the date, and initial each copy. Efficient follow through means a good paper trail, and no lost or forgotten issues. Your desk is clean and organized.**

**If you are told to do something that you believe is clearly out of policy, ask for the instruction in written memo form. Chances are you will never hear about it again. Energetic, enthusiastic leaders are having a good work experience. Proudly run a great program "stamped" with your particular flair: Make that your ambition. Being happy with your present position is the sure road to promotion.**

**Simply, you represent "the good." Within reason, you want what is best for your park and your patrons. Promoting correct usage of the facility makes the work day go faster, eliminates behavior problems along with vandalism, and earns the cooperation of the group. This makes your job easier if you enjoy keeping active, and can be very exciting for you. As you make your area welcoming and relevant to all who arrive, it will take about four years for the program of humble "sandlot" activities to mature. Then take the promotion, or be ready to gracefully transfer.**

**Recreation site workers will be used as a role model. Earn trust by remaining calm, fair, and focused on the best outcome for all present. Your forthcoming nature can create a positive resonance in the user group. Stake holders in public recreation programs constantly formulate their opinion of your program's true value to them. It is fair to ask them to put their heartfelt thanks in the form of a brief note to your supervisor. Once in forty years our employee group was encouraged to ask voters for help at the ballot box. You may ask your attendees of voting age to seek out candidates who promise to fund park service if those citizens find your effort to have worth to the community. People cherish the memory of a game, event, or "crafty crafter" forever. Patrons who came up through free public programs that drew their group together with satisfying outcomes fiercely support our profession.**

**Patron complaints must be heard. Work to move that conversation to an office, or other quiet part of the park. Hear people out. You might learn something new about your area. Ask questions. Show you are listening by repeating salient facts: “I hear you saying...” Give the best answer you can, and live up to your promise to get back to them if you need to research a more complete answer. You may solve a problem, or just give a harried individual a chance to vent. Verbal “judo,” or calming yourself to calm the situation, is very helpful. Let them finish, or risk hearing about it from your supervisor. Save their contact information. You may find a way to invite them to a later event.**

**Acting up is a call for attention by one or more individuals disrupting your program. Though every one gets respected, and inclusion is always possible, there are times when you must speak out, or act, to save the good times for everyone. The experience, all the patrons, and what you need on their behalf, is your motivation. Look for ways to include people who have acted badly. Consider that everyone may not possess your social skills, or sophistication, as they try to take part *in their own way*. After a time -- in a quiet manner -- state clearly that their enjoyment of the park requires respecting the group. The leader promotes safety. As individuals respect the group, they automatically become welcome. We grow together doing simple things well, while honoring each person’s efforts as we share the experience.**

**The safe zone, or neutral ground, you work to maintain is inviting for all who choose to use it in their civil interactions. When it works, the neighborhood wins. Everyone feels accepted, and good reactions get nurtured. Positive experiences in a welcoming, and interactive area, create space to develop personal potential. This is a wholesome expression of personal freedom. Doing something well, and looking forward to repeating that success, enhances self image. Positive feedback from friends enjoying legal fun at a park gives people a good feeling about the day, and themselves. People who enjoy accomplishing things in harmony with the group are called well adjusted. The above situation manifests through your proudly offered diversions which present enough action or detail to stir the patron’s curiosity -- the opening you need to focus their attention and motivate participation.**

**Support appropriate ideas and goals expressed by the group. As you make plans, remain flexible. Your experience, and the strength of an idea, may evoke an instantaneous reaction when something unique suddenly becomes possible. Find the great potential in spontaneous good times. Live in the moment with your patrons to be part of the life in your park. Lead as the hub of this great swirling human interaction.**

**As in baseball, the “moment” often is not governed by clock time. You certainly begin your presentations on time, but respect that the spirit of the moment may take over. Be ready for things you did not count on, some of which are just fine. Surrender to the possibility that a door may close. Stuff, including failure, happens. Be ready to laugh at yourself, a power role model reaction, as you regroup and move to what is possible. Believe that more chances always present themselves, and a new day always comes. You have to stop sometimes because the class is over, always at the end of stated athletic practice time, or because it is time to close. True community service is evident if you have left the patrons wanting more! Happy? Busy? The hours fly by!**

**The heart of the recreation business is knowing every participant as a person. Learn what they are proud to have accomplished at the public recreation area. Ask them their goals. Seek commonality: Ask how they are doing. Well meaning site supervisors continuously adjust their presentation, since only some of their ideas ever work.**

**The optimized experience is achieved by following this general course of action: Evaluate patron capabilities, needs, and goals. Study site potential, and ongoing usage, to identify available venues. Clearly note any available revenue from contractual programs, and paid adult leagues. Some of the profit from these program elements has often been earmarked for operating expenses. That amount is more than you need to present many free experiences. Then: Plan -- Produce -- Present -- Recap -- Plan -- Produce -- Present -- Add Infinitum as you build much anticipated chances to join in. Bring good ideas to life, as one event grows into the next. User groups have successfully worked together to create community events. Your efficient information sharing, with the goal of program growth, can lead to healthy traditional use patterns.**

**The humble pantheon of drop-in activities, the simple contests, observation/formation of regular/repeating user groups, a variety of special events, and finally, special days, must be a continuing cycle. Acknowledge neighborhood culture to help groups enjoy your site, so folks come together to entertain each other in ways familiar to them. Cut vandalism and behavior problems through proactive inclusion.**

**We react rationally to keep the situation normal: Spills must be cleaned up. Materials must be conserved. People and their property must be respected. Our reactions to patrons focus on what must be done so the entire group can enjoy the day. “Normal” is a neat trick: It is never a “given.” We engage in issues of safety, sanitation, and sharing, while doing our best to see that each participant has good experiences. The only difference between your park and a major theme park: No rides!**

**Display character in respecting opponents who have been kind enough to play with your team, so that after a contest the winner deserves congratulations. In recreation, getting the return match scheduled is more important than the final score to all but a few ego driven coaches.**

**You just save every permission slip you ever got, and copies of birth records as required by your hierarchy for as long as you remain at the site. Teach safe sports: No headhunting, hard slide tackling, or taking the charge. Play the ball, and avoid penalties. Honor players effort. The team will reflect your demeanor. Have a mechanism for relieving coaches of their duties if they fail to model good sportsmanship.**

**Understand your strengths -- stay within yourself. Only demonstrate the jump shot or corner kick, for example, if you have a good one. Find a talented volunteer to demonstrate an important sports or artistic fundamental properly whenever possible. Start from what you know by sharing what you enjoy. Chess can be played by most people. I show how each piece moves, and play without deep knowledge of tactics. Some “students” come to defeat me regularly. I compliment them, knowing I have won the grander game: The park setting holds their interest! Rules for every game, as well as an incredible number of craft ideas, are on the web. Make the best hot cocoa and lemonade in town!**

**Donations help, and grow out of good community relations. The parent driven bat and ball leagues will give you hand-me-down catcher's gear, old bats, and extra hats for use as Spring Egg Hunt prizes. Give them good service, and they may let you borrow their chalk line machine to mark your flag football, or soccer field. In time, your relationship may become so good with youth sports providers that they invite some of the park's financially challenged patrons to play "on scholarship."**

**Work with pride to enhance the civics of the entire group. My adult soccer league learned that youth baseball needed equipment, and made a large donation directly to their organization. Nurturing contact between park user groups helps all local residents celebrate their neighborhood together. Channel patron energy by sharing simple facts.**

**Adult sports will donate precious objects of play: Old leather softballs with shiny brown covers may feel extremely soft, or "squeezable." That ball is perfect for a beginner's pick-up game because it comes off the bat slow, and does not sting little hands trying to catch it. Be respectful when asking that this ball be donated, and very thankful to get it. If your gym hosts adult basketball, add the cost of a couple of fine leather balls to team fees each season. Mark used balls for indoor "check-out."**

**When seeking donations of candy, a large number of small pumpkins, or fountain drink coupons from local retail outlets, it is wise to approach the manager with a cover letter. Call ahead to get the store number, correct mailing address, and manager's name. Write a clear, official business letter. Several stores may be approached separately to be sure you get enough supplies for your special day. Your letter tells your needs, and event plans. It promises to include the store's name on a "thank you" banner posted at your event. Offer another letter of thanks showing the tax value of donations. Your instinct to build the fun through total inclusion yields volunteer magicians, musical groups, or events you never imagined possible: A couple of men who had been farm boys organized a memorable "catch the greased pig" event for us.**

**When a child's desire to win the hopscotch contest equals your leading citizen's motive to chair your recreation council, you will have learned.**

**Both of the above patrons need to hear your gentle, thoughtful, factual assessment of what it would take to achieve their goal. The realpolitik is that the person who wants to chair the council has some power, friends, perhaps enemies, and a reason for their goal. The hopscotch participant may someday, with your encouragement, become the chairperson of that same recreation body. We enjoyed the support of a mayor who was in a picture hanging at the local pool of a “water babies” group. The person you help may someday help your park, or your department, in ways you could never imagine. That little water baby certainly did!**

**I found two differences between the adults and children I served: Adults tell way more complex “stories,” and they will not “take it over.” Children can be savage -- avoid blind trust. Do not be in a room with one individual, especially behind a closed door, or toss anyone your car keys. Remember that all of your words have great meaning for impressionable folks. Avoid the modern trap of treating children like adults. Keep your high standards, so patron “buy-in” is on your terms.**

**I supervised an awesome leader who drew upwards of 120 youngsters per afternoon to a large ornamental lawn adjacent to an elementary school. The “facilities” amounted to three cast concrete picnic tables, and a free standing drinking fountain! The leader kept crafts, games, and sports equipment in the trunk of their car! There were crafts at the benches, sports, and traveling teams in all age groups that came to our evening leagues. You could see how play was tailored to the individuals who had arrived. The leader kept to a schedule of activities, which were presented with zeal. The joy and energy of that inspirational paragon was infectious! Everything at the operation was being done with great pride, and it all “mattered” so much! As far as I could tell, the leader truly enjoyed building friendships. We shared a manager who shook hands, asked to be called by a nickname, and said “I can work with anyone.” It was true, and I am sure it helped us both.**

**Finally, you may have to call 911. Get out of danger, and stay calm. Speak clearly, and follow instructions. Be alert to details so you can be a good witness. Tell management what happened as soon as possible.**

## **OPERATING YOUR COMMUNITY CENTER**

**I approached my first front line supervisory work shift with some trepidation. I knew what I wanted for the patrons, but now I had to figure out how to achieve success largely through the efforts of my employees. Would the staff listen and follow instructions? Could I promote free experiences while filling out a grease trap report, and checking batteries in our automatic external defibrillator?**

**The answer to my concerns came quickly in my first act as park director. An upset flag football referee, almost in tears, stormed in to the office during half time of the morning game. Then both coaches arrived. I had grown up in the activity they were presenting, and saw my former self in all three of them, so I felt a personal heartwarming moment. Quickly and quietly I mentioned that we were all at work. Since there was no suggestion that the referee was incompetent, I told both coaches that they had to accept the officiating with no further complaints. I asked them to please return to the sidelines and control their teams. I asked the young referee to stay a moment longer. He was doing great, I said, if both teams were angry. That made him smile. He wanted to continue, so I told him to take charge. I could tell he was doing his best -- he had my total support. I asked him to let me know after the game if there were any more problems, since we had both quickly understood that the coaches were pressuring him "to get a call." I watched briefly from very far away, just long enough to be seen by both coaches, as I verified that harmony reigned. I saw that I had learned my job by coming up through the ranks.**

**That kind of simple situation kept repeating. I efficiently gathered all relevant facts, and implemented the best possible outcome. It is always best to do a great deal of careful listening. Sometimes it is wise to take a day to think about a decision. Be ready to tell people that you will study the situation, and get back to them. Remember that "everything you say can and will be used against you." Use very few carefully chosen words in replies to antagonistic folks, or those opposed to departmental policy. No good deed goes unpunished; stay within policy.**



**Being able to express yourself clearly is crucial. Do the fourth rewrite on memos and press releases. I taped the minutes to my volunteer council's meetings, then transcribed in long hand, and wrote the final draft from the rough. Letting another person proof read your work is efficient when possible. The classes you take in computer spread sheets, of the kind your municipality uses for account procedures, will pay you great career dividends. Be able to use all the features.**

**Learn all you can before promotions become available. Commit to your career in charge of a community center. Take it upon yourself to assume a large share of responsibility for your professional training. Let management know, hopefully while you are being congratulated for having success in the workplace, that your goal is to promote in recreation. Seek out mentors in the chain of command for frank advice in polishing specific job related skills, practice interviews, and ways in which you might get the experience you need. Be patient, and totally disinterested in gossip. Then, at the interview, name it and claim it!**

**One of my former sandlot stars had become a CPA. I interviewed in his thousand dollar suit. The panel included a recent supervisor of mine. She had seen my success in playground programming, special events, sports, and a very special citywide contest presented by that former "water baby," the Mayor. Still, I was extremely fortunate to get the job.**

**My first goal at my area was to be organized. Only understandable, well designed, and repeatable procedures may be delegated to staff for completion under your supervision. As one of your employees earns a "thank you" or "well done," ask if they have considered a career in recreation. The question is often taken as a compliment. Resulting employee "buy-in" can result in increased curiosity, an enhanced work product, and successful recreation programs. You also begin to achieve part of your supervisor's job description: Helping the employees who report to you get ready to promote. All of my employees learned that they could expect to assume supervised responsibility as rapidly as their good judgement and technical ability permitted. They were surprised by the detail of my performance reviews. Many did quite well. My employees were important to me. We shared pride in worthy efforts.**

**Have a staff meeting upon assuming control of a recreation facility. Emphasize cleanliness, safety, and your adherence to progressive discipline. You are wise to promise never to use the same level of discipline for an employee's second infraction of the same departmental rule. It is just not fair to employees who are following procedure. Worse yet, if you are seen as unable to maintain staff discipline, productivity will suffer as good employees watch slackers "getting away with it." Show where the official discipline manual is kept, smile, and suggest a powerful path to success: "If the head of the department was watching, would I be doing this now." "I am here," you say, "to provide the best possible recreation experience for all park patrons." Your first application of formal discipline shows you use it fairly when necessary.**

**Then call maintenance staffers in attendance by name as you honor the crucial nature of their service. Invite them to speak about the tasks which must be completed daily by the rest of the staff, and then let them get back to work.**

**All staff members must dump office trash cans at the end of their shift, and clean the comfort stations as necessary after the maintenance worker's shift ends. Spills and broken glass must be thoroughly cleaned up immediately. Litter must be thrown away by staff making the rounds with a trash pick-up stick. Check for gum on the gym floor, or soda cans left under benches. The custodial staff does deep cleaning, floor polishing, field dragging, sprinkler maintenance, and other big jobs. Their valuable time should not be wasted by the irritation of cleaning up little messes when they arrive in the early morning. Sugary food wrappers create ant trails if left overnight. Properly respected maintenance workers will deliver an enhanced work product. Patrons will help us keep the park clean if they find it clean. Weekend staff may have to re-bag full trash cans, and do a trash run to the dumpster.**

**After showing you are serious, start the fun. Invite each staff member to describe what programs they have worked with, what works, specifically, in this park, and what they would like to accomplish in the near future. Take notes, appreciating this valuable input. Get an availability form worksheet, with contact information, from everyone.**

**The employee contact sheets become the first page of each one's working file kept under your key in the office. In our modern era of heightened security you ask for only the last four digits of their social security number. They should also record your departmental operation closest to their home. In a big emergency they may be needed to report closer to home than their regular work place. Ask which employees can share a phone number on a posted sheet for all staff members to use if emergency coverage suddenly becomes necessary.**

**Remember that employees want to do well -- they want to keep their job. Make regular, brief entries in each one's working file noting job performance, adherence to policy, accomplishments, response to your instructions, as well as any shortcomings out of policy. Date every entry. Tell your manager when you make a negative entry.**

**We, as recreation supervisors, are by nature magnanimous as we model correct presentation of leisure time activities. Some "adults" mistake empathy for weakness. You must guard against being taken advantage of by unique personalities or an individual's bad judgment. The working file contains copies of written memos regarding substandard job performance, or actions out of policy. These memos should contain appropriate excerpts from the department's civil service rules, along with resulting action taken by management. Be sure to keep the working files updated fairly for all of your direct reports, as you treat everyone the same. Note verbal warnings and counseling. Consistent documentation must be displayed at civil service discipline hearings. Your application of progressive discipline, periodic written employee performance reports, as well as specific answers to your manager's questions are facilitated by up to date working files. If you have a written record of discipline in a working file, do not also note the situation in an employee's annual review. One admonition is sufficient.**

**Use a low key, congenial style to share your needs for the park clearly and briefly. You modify behavior, and instruct employees, by saying "I need," rather than "You should..." Remain positive by valuing employees through discreet verbal counseling. If you clarify the rules, while guiding employees to correct action, you are just supervising.**

**Your manager might agree that a first informal counseling session with an employee ought not to be recorded in their working file. A more stringent response could be required if an employee's first offense seems to involve serious misconduct. Documentation must include written notes made while speaking with everyone involved in private. Make certain to contact a member of the chain of command immediately if the problem seems serious. You want to be sure to do the right thing, while keeping your leadership notified in a timely fashion.**

**Help employees succeed by giving them the training, supplies, and equipment they need to accomplish the task you assign. Stay in touch, and even help out briefly, with any job in the park. "Catch them doing something right," as you check back to see if they need anything to complete the work, or if they have a question. Be pleased with questions, and thank them for asking. You owe them the most complete answer. Get back to them efficiently if you need to learn the answer yourself. Respectfully ask how long they think it will take to complete the task, or be ready for the next project. A tighter span of control -- increased watchfulness -- is used when training, or bringing job performance up to standard. Say "thank you" or "good job" when appropriate. This means a lot when delivered by a pleasant, energetic supervisor like you! Note all examples of growing production and reliability in their working file. Remember, you succeed through their efforts. Take a moment to plan how the time you have saved through successful delegation can best be used on behalf of all your patrons.**

**Be sure motivated employees take their breaks and lunch periods on time as scheduled. You are a link in the chain of command. Ask if you can please be kept informed, and have the first chance to solve the park's problems. Supply a management contact for staff in case you do not satisfy their concerns. Support your employees as much as possible.**

**Work for thorough understanding as you get input from employees. Add their suggestions and thoughts to your own when conceiving new programs. Gently, doggedly, stick to your goals as you act on behalf of your site, while remembering that others have brains. It would be great to credit a staff member with the enhancement of your program.**

**If a patron or employee is being emotional, or “irrational,” in your opinion, while you are trying to achieve compliance with some request or instruction, try saying: “I can see you are angry,” or “I can see you are sad,” or “I can see you are frustrated.” By verbalizing your perception of the agitated person’s emotional state, you may allow them to move on to the facts of the situation at hand. Amazingly, it works! People have actually thanked me for helping them get past their feelings. You may even be accused of being a thoughtful person! People shared their life situation with me, and I listened as time permitted. When they finished, I could only ask “So, what are you going to do?” People need and appreciate the chance to share with a caring person. Never try to solve their problems for them. That is their responsibility.**

**Be pleased to find correct comfort station cleaning, checking, and stocking procedures. Comfort station cleaning procedures is a great first training to offer your staff. Tolerate no odors, which often result from a dirty diaper in the trash. Emphasize that waiting to re-bag that smelly can may result in having to wash it out if the liner breaks. Be certain that your park employees have a water key, know how to deploy the “caution-wet floor” sign, get the hose out, put on the face shield, gloves, rubber boots, and a protective suit, if necessary, to clean the worst case releases of bodily fluids. Post a sign in comfort stations at your park requesting patrons to “Please tell a staff member if this area needs cleaning or restocking.” Anything short of a crime scene must be addressed immediately. Make certain staff knows where the caution tape is, in the rare case an area must be put off limits. Be clear that dirty comfort stations are cleaned, not locked. You would be amazed!**

**Patrol the entire site at least three times in your eight hour work shift. Document, or immediately address, slip/trip hazards, broken glass, wet or yellow spots in the lawn, broken sprinklers, water leaks, burned out light bulbs, graffiti, litter, individuals drunk in public, transient camps, “forts,” or dangerous activity. Check fences for holes, protruding wire, broken gates, sagging poles, missing wire fasteners, and sharp edges. Find time to enjoy a moment with patrons. With experience, you can grow an all inclusive program exponentially while answering the phone, checking payroll, making bank deposits, and taking rental reservations.**

**Spend a little time participating in the craft activity, take a turn at the game in progress, or socialize briefly to get in touch with your park population and assess events in progress. Try to imagine what else these particular patrons might enjoy that is actually possible. Begin building relationships with the members of your public volunteer body, if you have one, or work with your chain of command to learn if you may be allowed to start a recreation council. I also had success in partnering with an existing council at another nearby public area.**

**Your volunteer park board gives advice in the formulation of leisure time activities. Board members become signatories for the checking account you administer on behalf of the public. Keep control of the checkbook to conserve, and account for, the public funds. Your department, or board, may place some of these funds in a general fund column of your accounting ledger. You replenish your petty cash out of this column, which is all you need for simple activities. As programs grow, add a good second hand refrigerator, a microwave oven for popcorn, or a shaved ice machine for Summer sno cones.**

**Cultivate the membership of your volunteer recreation council with the same care as any of your other program activities. Five or six members, including one from each user group, is about right. A senior citizen member may take the long view, and consider all park user needs. They also can be accessible check signatories. Include a couple of youth sports parents. Encourage “single issue” members to volunteer at a craft table during family day, or run the stopwatch at your track meet.**

**Express your belief that board membership requires some community service. That assertion yielded unique special events, as well as donated llama rides and a cotton candy machine rental. Lobby your council to use the municipality’s most basic charter rules with no modifications.**

**Youthful patrons wishing to play intramurals may urge their parent or caregiver to attend a council meeting, and seek formation of a “sandlot” league. Parents and volunteer board members have the power to make such a request. You, or a qualified staff member, volunteers to organize teams, make a schedule, and referee the games. That’s the real job.**

**Financially challenged areas with no fee programs have had penny drives. We raised cash by putting our pictures on five jars with slots cut in the plastic screw tops. Deposited coins voted for the “ugly man.” It was enough. Build a groundswell of support for ideas that fit your park after discussing the possibilities with management. You can only help patrons in approved ways, so be a “company person.”**

**Identify simple ways to keep your regularly attending youth occupied after school and on Saturdays. Bring your approved goals for sand lot intramurals, low cost craft projects, or the need for a digital camera to create a picture wall bulletin board, to the recreation council meeting. Seek funding responsibly by getting at least three bids for large items.**

**Even if you are placed in charge at a park with no fee programs, there are easy alternatives if you are industrious on behalf of your patrons. Adult leagues, and weekend softball tournaments run from the park director’s desk, are lucrative to the point where special amenities may be added to big celebrations. You can generate “seed money” for your volunteer board to start new programs, or finance park improvements.**

**National softball organizations have all the information you need to run adult competitions. They even offer low cost player insurance. Your management team will help you proceed. If you have a gym, adult basketball may already be going strong. The same county association that supplies high school referees can service your gym until you get your own stable of officials in order. Quietly learn if it is possible for your office to operate adult leagues, and wait for your chance to assume control. Private “for profit” league presenters come and go.**

**The Rucker League in New York City is an attractive model for Summer games outdoors. Start your own legendary league. Organize and operate through your desk to eliminate the contracted presenter, so everyone can afford to play. You do not even need an indoor court to realize a modest profit by organizing warm weather basketball fun. If you only have “half courts,” you can present a wonderful 3 on 3 tournament. It is OK to start small. When you have permission, and the use of a public bank account, find an adult sports need and fill it.**

**If you have control of an appropriate field, try 3-pitch softball. Start “Spring leagues” after the rainy season, followed by “Summer leagues” that end before Thanksgiving. Eight team leagues, playing one night per week with hour-long games, take about 18 weeks for a “season,” including rainouts and play-offs. Get bids for league balls from established sporting goods outlets. Trust their advice on the best ball for your weekend tournament, or league. Check umpire fees, and their preferred method of payment. Learn about the “runners” home plate, “banned” bats for co-ed play, and the “sixty minute” rule. Publicize with detailed fliers, which include a cost break down. Talk up your organizational meeting as you hand local players a flier. Encourage new team formation. Play on a team yourself to find out “how it goes.”**

**The formational league, or tournament, meeting lasts about an hour. It ought to be at least 3 weeks prior to the first game. Start at 6:30 PM on a weeknight at your area. Get the business out of the way by distributing roster forms, insurance information as required by your department, and collecting a check from each team. Write the official receipt as you are handed the check, and immediately put your copy of the receipt in your bank bag paper clipped to their check. Use a “white board” to list paid teams. Get each team manager’s, and assistant manager’s, contact information on your sign-up sheet before they leave. You want e-mail, and two phone numbers, for every team. Announce the first game time and opponents, and as much of the schedule as possible, as soon as the teams have paid. Your \$25.00 administrative cost per team “covers all the details” (and funds youth/senior activities).**

**Let the managers vote on special rules, and the timing of games (within the limits of your hours of operation), as you agree on league rules. Leagues typically allow no players to be added to a team’s roster after the first half of the season. Schedule a double round robin, where teams see each other twice, and a simple single elimination play-off seeded by final league standings. Lucrative weekend tournaments can begin with four team double elimination formats. It is crucial to host four evenly matched teams. “Softball Champion” (over your park’s name) XL, or “French cut,” t-shirts go to the winners. Fighting is a mandatory ejection. No beer in the dugouts is wise. “Game time is forfeit time.”**



**You may wish to include a forfeit bond in your fee schedule. If a team fails to notify you in a timely fashion that they will not be able to play, or has too few players to begin play, they lose the bond. Be clear on how rainouts will be announced. Generally, you have a phone message recorded by a promised time on game day -- “otherwise, show up.”**

**Schedules include a paragraph reminding teams of the special rules you all agreed on, and game formats. Rainouts or cancelled games result in the need for a revised schedule. A few players may have to come a long way, so get this right, and distributed promptly. Double check to be sure everyone knows when they play after you make necessary changes.**

**You need an official league score book, field dragged, and freshly bagged trash cans. Safety check bases, anchored in good condition, that sit level on the playing surface. Be sure the edges of home plate sit flush. You will learn much from your core group of teams. Let them run their successful experience through you, the “commissioner.” You know you are on the right track when players call you this with a smile.**

**Six team adult basketball leagues, playing one night per week with a 90 minute “window” for each game, can run three “seasons” per year. Save December through Valentine’s day just for youth games, please. Figure the cost, by the game, of a score keeper for basketball. With an electronic score board, place two people at the scorer’s table. Teams get assigned a color, and must supply their own uniforms. Use the “pro,” or approved college ball, for play. It is especially nice for the youngest levels of your youth intramural basketball to “inherit” the approved adult women’s ball, a quality product that bounces properly. To begin your basketball leagues you only need a folding table for the scorebook, a simple “flip” manual scoreboard, and folding chairs for team benches.**

**Some parks have slowly aquired fitness room equipment, and created a profitable exercise room. Invite patrons who are serious about safely getting in good condition to promote the idea of a weight room at your recreation council meeting. Work with management to formulate informed consent forms, injury waivers, age requirements for use, and a fee schedule. Learn by visiting successful recreation weight rooms.**

**Be wary of placing cardio machines like treadmills and elliptical gliders. The upkeep of those machines will drain profits. Except for powder coating dumbbells, and perhaps the purchase of a sturdy smith machine, free weights do not incur much ongoing upkeep expenditure. Neither do passive things like chin-up bars, a roman chair, or high quality benches. Train staff in safe usage, and watch for bad actors. Your self supporting weight room will be a long term cash cow to provide amenities for all age groups who find your recreation center.**

**While checking the area, nurturing employees, and operating programs with the help of your public recreation council, you must keep the books for their public account. Though the board may have a secretary who might write a letter, and a treasurer who watches over you to some extent, the responsibility for reconciling the check book and writing the minutes to their meetings is yours.**

**Start by getting a Federal tax I.D. number for your recreation council, or permission to use the same number as a nearby “sister” council. It is necessary if you offer independently contracted fee based programs.**

**Your cash receipts and disbursements must be recorded in a ledger, or a spreadsheet program, with columns for each activity, such as “weight room,” or “youth sports.” The money out record must be accompanied with a signed voucher for each expenditure accompanied by the actual receipt of payment for each purchase. Keep your paperwork in order so you can total every column monthly and reconcile it with your bank statement. Work with your bank so your statement begins and ends on the first and last day of each month. This is especially nice at the end of the calendar year, because you eliminate the possibility of having to reconcile the last few days of December as a separate reporting period.**

**The voucher for an expenditure is usually signed by two council members. Make a memorable moment for your board by carefully thanking the signatories to the voucher, and the check that begins your petty cash fund. Be ready to explain the need for replacement table tennis equipment, egg hunt candy, an antibacterial hand soap dispenser for the kitchen, and wiggly eyes for upcoming seasonal craft projects.**

**If you can gain support, run simple free programs using petty cash, and the time you have between the performance of your functionary duties. Keep busy serving the individual needs of all your patrons. As the hours fly by, you will be amazed at the energy your groups will expend, and how a thoughtfully directed park operates without problems.**

**Share a vision of the action your efforts provide. Bring fliers for all the activities -- with permission slips to detach from the bottom of the sheet -- to subsequent recreation council meetings. You may have a couple of action photos to share, or examples of finished crafts. Get feedback from your council members about other activities that might follow your successful current presentations.**

**One of my council members represented the local radio controlled model airplane club that met at our building. That group staged a great event where youngsters built a flying model plane. It was free to all who signed up. We had a wonderful “fly in” using up the club’s scrap balsa to make simple wooden gliders. The planes were decorated with magic markers. The club members gave youngsters the ability to build and adjust their gliders for optimum flight during the four hour event.**

**Be clear that you would not ask your citizen group to subsidize under attended, failing fee based activities. It may be possible, however, for your council to move “seed money” to a new column in the ledger book for equipment, or a specific stipend, so a qualified instructor could begin what might be a successful and profitable new program in your park. Such instructors begin with a cover letter to the recreation council seeking a chance to share their proposal at a council meeting. Set time and funding limitations for the attempt to become profitable.**

**Focus on your clientele, who may need some level of service, guidance, or direction to correctly use the “physical site.” Attend to the human assemblage, the true value of your presence, between functionary duties. Let the patrons be your social life at work. Everyone feels welcome and respected as you use the space between the renters to keep them busy. This eliminates much of the graffiti, vandalism, squabbling, and frustration of individuals who perceive that they have been left out.**

**You are ebullient when it is your turn to speak at public meetings. You see the possible, keep trying, and recap thoughtfully to gain insight for the next best effort. Written submissions take the form of timely reports to managers, a good number of memos, agendas -- posted three days early -- and the minutes you prepare from your volunteer board meetings. Your recap holds highlights as well as bean counting. Look for chances to survey the public after events, activities, and programs. Always tell people they can remain anonymous by turning the survey sheet over and giving us the information we need to make it better for you. Feedback can be brought to meetings to help plan future offerings.**

**Four seasonal programs per year are published. They are in schools, at libraries, on nearby public counters, and in your reception area three weeks prior to the time they begin. You may have to post a working copy long before that if people are calling about camps, leagues, or classes. You stay one season, plus an extra month, ahead in quarterly program planning. It may take four weeks to develop a correct final first draft. Allow two weeks for management approval. Show your program to the recreation board members out of courtesy, and to see if they would like any changes. Then add two weeks for reproduction, and two weeks for distribution. Avoid pressure with ample lead time. Computer graphics are OK. Cut and paste icons are more vivid.**

**Individual program fliers take way less time. They should be shown to your manager, and displayed proudly at a recreation council meeting before distribution. It is best to have a unique flier for each activity in addition to the seasonal program. Activity information is placed over a permission slip which is cut on the dotted line, and returned before the second meeting of the activity. You often only need fifty fliers for a program. Having a small photocopier, or scanner/fax/copier at the center is a great time saver if your program can afford the luxury. If your park is in any kind of an upscale area, or if your amenities are outstanding, you may be offering an assortment of fee based camps, classes, and sports leagues. In the most fortunate, active sites there will still be the waifs, the urchins, lonely seniors, and retirees on small fixed incomes looking for a couple of mid morning exercise classes per week out of the cold. Can you add them all to your program?**

**Many volunteer recreation boards will be interested. Your chain of command may or may not be interested. We hear that a mind is a horrible thing to waste -- how about the human potential of a person? A simple guided experience is a very special event to some. Delight youthful patrons by taking a turn at the Connect 4 game. A truly businesslike professional will never miss an opportunity. Yours is an eclectic, multi-tasking, profession. The “fun” never stops. Hopefully you like people, and love the action!**

**Front line supervisors are responsible for all of the property allocated to their location, and being sure everything is where it belongs. Set an example by putting everything in its proper place. You will keep several inventories, which record the date individual items were purchased or placed, the date surveyed out, and why. Separate lists are kept of municipal equipment, and items donated by the recreation board. Use, or generate, a first aid kit check list to make sure you have everything. Check your eyewash expiration date. As each procedure is codified, it may be delegated. Find the recharge date on paper tags attached to each of your fire extinguishers. Verify correct site storage of volatile liquids and pesticides. Earn the respect of your staff by learning all rules relating to hazardous materials kept at your location. Be in compliance. Power tool use, pesticide application, and comfort station cleaning, require personal protective equipment. Check that it is available, in good condition, and always used. Staff safety is crucial.**

**Your orderly office displays as many separate calendars as necessary to record use of specific rooms and fields. All staff members can consult them to check the availability of areas for prospective rentals. You are the only staff member who can finalize a rental. Staff gives information and blank forms. Records and information are kept in a neat row of 3-ring binders. They hold: 1) faxes, 2) department/division policy, 3) volunteer council minutes, correspondence, and agendas, 4) annual plans developed with your maintenance staff to use the best methods for pest removal, fertilization, and aerification, 5) water bills, 6) service records, 7) lists of uniforms, and items issued to staff members, 8) day to day duties/emergency procedures, 9) official discipline manual, 10) program activity sign-in sheets, and 11) recreation program methods.**

**Keep account ledgers, vouchers, receipts, and checkbooks locked up in metal file cabinets along with forms the department requires you to save. Do not mix your own purchases on an official receipt. At first, file everything until you know what is safe to throw away. You will re-use fliers, and consult old rosters.**

**Seasonal programs, individual activity fliers, and the weekly schedule are posted by the phone so any staff member can share accurate information. Post emergency contact numbers.**

**Avoid being critical of methods, people, or operations. You may be “down talking” a plan to the author. Everyone has not forsworn gossip the way you have. Those in power value brief “straight talk,” as long as it is not critical of them. Doggedly support management. Quickly make things work out right for them. They will remember. Argue with the boss? First ask yourself “Is this the hill I want to die on.” Be glad that they carefully listen to you. I found one answer to the overarching management question, which is “How is it going?” “Great,” I said, which left more time to work on behalf of all my patrons. I wanted to be the goal setter -- the force multiplier -- who could blend volunteers with staff, or hire a youngster to referee on a fee per game basis for a season. Being organized -- on time with required paperwork, and responding to safety needs efficiently -- left me time after school, in the early evenings, and on Saturday mornings for the business of people.**

**Develop polite relationships with old hands in your job classification so you can pick up the phone and ask a question. You will have a need to improve your record keeping formats, accounting procedures, or questions about fee waivers or surcharges, and annual financial statements. You may have to learn how to defense a fast break ball club, or borrow someone’s cherished “new games” (there are 37 of them) book. Model your record keeping after your department’s “best.” Fellow employees will “talk you through” all these scenarios if you have been there for them. That receptionist you thoughtlessly slighted is the “gate keeper.” You could find that your “important” paperwork was put on the bottom of the stack! Learn everyone’s name. Be appreciative, and thank each one for their valuable time.**

**Keep up with the training sessions your department offers. Take notes, and save the handouts your fellow employees proudly produced. First, seek the training that qualifies you to interview job candidates. You will gain great insight into the promotional interview process by interviewing others. It is a unique “experiential” training that will help you promote. Your most useful, loyal employees will be the ones you hired after sitting on their interview panel. Your job includes teaching them all you know so they can promote, even to a higher level than yourself. Then, as soon as possible, get all formal discipline training.**

**Try to keep an office hour, beginning at 4:30 PM, to meet potential renters, address adult sports details, sit down, eat, check phone and fax messages, and address any important matters before headquarters closes. This is your established time for call backs. Get all the information you need on the first call, if possible. You will be very glad you started keeping a phone log in your desk drawer. You will go to it in a time of need. Set a goal of limiting phone calls to 3 minutes, and strictly business. Update your “to do list” daily.**

**Everyone deserves their self respect, so work to preserve each person’s dignity. Resolve situations honestly. Ask, “May I help you,” and make all reasonable accommodations. Eliminate half of your problems by never double booking a venue, and allowing at least an hour between picnics or large gatherings. Sometimes you solve a problem by bringing out an old folding table along with a few folding chairs if all the picnic benches are taken up. Check these items out with a picture ID so your equipment does not “drive away.” Showing you care by doing all you can to make it a good time for everyone goes a long way to keep the peace. You may be offered a wonderful plate of picnic lunch. To avoid conflict of interest I said I had already eaten, but could they please feed the gardener who had made the park so beautiful. In this connection, I would catch my caretaker walking through a large, happy crowd of park users and say: “Ladies and Gentlemen! Let me introduce the person responsible for keeping this park beautiful! How about a big hand for       name      !” Crowds like to cheer. Everybody loved it when the gardener took a bow, and waived with a big smile. It was free fun, and a cost effective method of recognizing a valued employee.**

**Try a technique that worked for me: Occasionally ask staff members for your report card. Get their frank appraisal of you! I supervised a few years before I started doing this, but if you are fearless, it is a great conversation starter. I got “well done” a few times, which was much appreciated, as well as thoughtful questions about why things are the way they are. The answers to those questions gave staff a chance to see their recreation area through the eyes of elected officials, our chain of command, leading volunteers on the recreation board, and parents who have, or believe they have, the best interests of a team or program at heart. We got to politics, bottom line realities, and where the power lies. You sometimes have to ask an employee to trust you because, for example, you cannot really understand what it is like to be a parent until you have been one. I had to tell them that most policy and rules had been written long ago because of problems, inappropriate actions, and embarrassments before we started working. The process was maturational for part time staff. They were pleased that I took their opinions into account.**

**Comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act by remembering that you are temporarily ambulatory, and -- perhaps -- currently without special needs. Find ways to make your activities possible for all comers. Occasionally it is not reasonable to provide one on one care or supervision for some individuals. You learn what you can do by making the effort. Children are amazingly accepting and supportive of new friends with special needs, as we all must be. Any architectural upgrades to your site must comply with the ADA. It is just the right thing to do, and it is federal law.**

**What was on your site prior to modern development? Was it a farm? Who are adjoining streets named after? Is a local person famous for some accomplishment that ought to be commemorated? Could a meeting room be named for a medal of honor winner? Is there a spot where you can construct a new horse shoe pit? Has anyone found fossils, a fault line, unique flora and fauna, or interesting rocks at your park? Do you have a location in your park where a college class could place a historical or informational marker? Could Eagle Scouts build you a running long jump pit, or a fitness par course?**



**Examine every source entity that requires people to perform community service. Use all that is suitable. It turned out we had high school seniors who needed to give their community 150 hours of service. This led to free cheerleading class in the Spring, and an injured star quarterback coached our flag football team one season. “Cross age tutoring” requires thoughtful adult supervision. As activities continue, make a record of what did work. Build on it. Get as much community input for seasonal fliers as possible. Traditions begin in your second year, unless you inherit an established, active location. Keep all the good things. Volunteers grow out of programs they enjoyed. You will see youngsters keeping busy practicing for the next sport season if you have blended enough drama with fairness, even competition, and interesting detail. Crafty crafters will be eager to keep cutting, gluing, and painting if you enjoy it with them, and admire their work. I hope you love it. I never felt more useful and alive than being a public servant. I wonder what a Florence Nightingale or Thomas Jefferson would do. Would they learn the rules to the sport in season so they could referee a game while the answering machine recorded calls?**

**One of my sites was centrally located, and had a beautiful picnic lawn. Up to five yellow busses per day would park at lunch for day campers from other public and private operations to eat and play. They left a mess, which was not fair to my patrons or staff. Since I had to respect everyone, I proceeded carefully. I contacted other providers to ask that park users leave areas like they find them, and clean up any mess they made. I was being pleasant, and we worked together to develop an information contact sheet. Then, when busses parked, we would approach the group leader with the sheet on a clip board. We got the name of their organization, the supervisor of their program, and their name. We asked for their public contact phone number. We asked why they had come. Then, if they were going to eat, we offered trash bags, and asked that their staff leave the area like they found it. We opened the nearby dumpster, and showed where to take the full bags of the trash they generated. We asked them to re-bag the cans when they removed their full bag. It worked. I was able to keep my high standard of cleanliness. We knew they would be coming, so certain cans were cleared early, and all trash was picked up before any picnickers arrived.**

## **CONTRACTUAL PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

**The community center supervisor administrates fee based programs at their site as the agent of the volunteer recreation body. Contracts signed with independent contractors, along with their current proof of insurance declaration pages, and session records, are kept in the metal file cabinet. These contractors present camps, holiday day care, or classes at your site. Contractual programs must certainly pay for themselves. You save their payroll time cards, their fliers, daily sign in/sign out sheets, official receipts, and summaries from each session chronologically for a proscribed time period. Civil servants do not set contractor's employee's work hours, or direct work in progress.**

**Your federal tax I.D. number, and public bank account, is in place. You are ready to interview prospective independent contractors who wish to provide your center with "for profit" activities, at your recreation council meeting. Require candidates to submit a brief cover letter stating their specific intentions, and all details regarding their potential program. Get their letter well ahead of time so you can put them on the meeting agenda under "new business," if that is acceptable to your board and manager. Ask candidates for references. Your volunteers, and chain of command, may prefer that you first use a meeting to discuss the concept of contractual programming. If so, make an entry on the agenda to consider inviting prospective candidates to a subsequent meeting. Hiring independent contractors is a group effort. Take the time to do what is best for your park, and everyone concerned.**

**Each contractual presentation comes with unique challenges. Will you allow martial arts teachers to include full contact sparing in their curriculum? Do you have proper mats for tumbling, or small furniture in a securable area for safe "tiny tot" classes? Do you have the time and space, if you are contacted by an accredited yoga teacher? Does your community approve of yoga? Volume day care, in the form of day camps, is a valuable service if you are close to bedroom communities, or on a main road that many heads of households take to work.**

**The contract through your office with the recreation council does not create an employer/employee relationship, agency, or partnership. It is not a joint venture between your recreation department, the public volunteer council, and the contractor. Your manager may provide a generic contract for use with every kind of piece work provider from a youth sports referee to the Summer Camp Director. You may have to add many paragraphs to the basic contract depending on the activity.**

**Independent contractors hold no franchise, but work only for the stated time frame of the contract. You become the customer, not the immediate supervisor. Therefore, you must be specific on every point of service you require in the initial contract. This is your only chance to make requirements. When the contract is signed you can only cancel the activity if there are insufficient sign-ups to pay the contractor, or if the presentation is unsafe. One camp director was let go after his bottle rocket went sideways, and barely missed a sunbather.**

**Generic “boiler plate” contracts will show the first and last dates that the agreement is active, as well as how and when payment for services is to be made. It makes clear that you provide no medical or other benefits. The type and amount of insurance coverage to be submitted on a current policy declaration page will be specified. You may require that the contractor’s million dollar hold harmless liability policy lists your town, it’s employees, and agents as additional insured. Your manager will decide which activities require insurance. The youth sports referee or basketball scorekeeper need not be insured.**

**Learn exactly what the provider wants to offer, and decide if some element must be prohibited. We did not allow massage, for example. If the karate class will have sparing, find out exactly what the limits are. Ask the instructor if it is possible in their style to make light contact only in the abdomen area, and never above the shoulders, or from the belt to the knees. The use of sharp items in cooking or crafts by youngsters is prohibited. Be specific about how the group will be organized around the hot oven, or open flame. It seems too cautious until you see a 7 year old ironing waxed paper, a young kite maker using a single edged razor blade, or a badly bleeding karate student.**

**Require that all contractors provide their own fliers that meet your approved guidelines. Spell out deadlines so you have time to get printing and distribution taken care of. Demand constant watchful supervision of every individual. Every session must utilize a sign-in and sign-out sheet. Children's activities must use a contact information sheet for all participants, signed by the responsible adult. Include room for information on who may pick up their child, and who, if anyone, is prohibited. They sign-in and sign-out their child each day. There must be strictly adherence to beginning and ending times for each session, and each meeting. Late pick up fees can be on the flier. Contractors are required, in writing, to leave the areas they use cleaned up before they leave each day. The use of publicly owned equipment may or may not be allowed. Specifically record whether or not such things as paper, paint, or crayons must be supplied by the contractual program.**

**It is good community relations to finalize all contractual offerings in time for them to be publicized on upcoming seasonal programs before the first meeting. It is only fair to the provider that the public has time to learn about new programs so they can make an informed choice and join in. Contractors are free to spread the word in local media. Work on the press release with them. We did public service announcement radio spots for a camp. It was very effective.**

**It is best to have your Spring and Summer Camp Director signed to no more than a one year contract by early January. Your previous year's recap, and evaluation of customer surveys, was finished before Halloween. You need accurate information in time for the Spring Seasonal Program. Get the interview process going, if necessary, before the Winter holidays.**

**Camps, or tot "classes" make extra demands on contractual providers necessary. Require that weekly itineraries, or "lesson plans," be placed for all customers at the sign-out sheet on the proceeding Wednesday for the following Monday. Day camp field trips for Spring break and the first week of Summer must be publicized early on an advertising flier. Require that a cell phone number for the contractor be placed on the flier. Unswervingly demand at least a 10 to 1 ratio of campers to staff.**

**No matter what the age group of the camp you are contracting for, require that their working staff wear highly visible logo T-shirts. For ages 5 to 12, or a “kinder camp” -- ages 3 to 5, require “name learning” circle games every Monday and Wednesday morning. Make Thursday the major field trip day. Then it is likely that campers have gotten used to staff for at least a day or two before going off site. Contractors can be directed to greet, and extend farewells, to youngsters by name.**

**Camp staff ought to agree to a major activity each day, with related age group activities. Delineate lunch time supervision requirements, and “bath rooming” modalities -- which we described as a pair of campers with appropriate camp employee oversight.**

**The location of eating must be made clear. Popcorn is the only food allowed inside, and only during videos. Lunches may be kept on a table which should be kept a couple of inches out from the wall. Be certain no spills or crumbs are allowed to stay on the table at the end of the day. Put uneaten food in the refrigerator if you cannot get campers to take it home. Ants leave a chemical trail to follow back to food, and they are hard to get rid of, once you allow a mess. Work with contractors to insure that ants are not found swarming over lunches.**

**The contractor has no authority, express or implied, to bind the municipality or public body to any obligation. Be sure of the individual before you put your good name on an agreement with them, and then watch them carefully. Your patron’s well being and your professional judgment are on that signature line. No insurance policy protects you from gross negligence or willful misconduct by you or your staff. All you can do is be clear in the written contract regarding all of your detailed, specific performance requirements. Qualifications for employment could include current first aid/CPR training.**

**Consider adding a box to check on each day’s sign-in/sign-out sheet when fees and/or signed permission slips have been received. These records help track new arrivals or “drop-ins” to be sure all fees get collected. By saving these records you can also verify attendance if a loss or injury is claimed as a result of the program.**

**Your paperwork will be fine tuned and customized over the years to simplify revealing money in, and money out for your ledger columns. Keep track of when customers came, how they paid, and their specific fee. Classes were summarized over a 10 week, quarterly session, but weekly day camp sessions were more paperwork intensive. The line of information for each patron has to carry unique details if you allow campers to attend for half days, or charge more if someone only comes on field trip day.**

**Add up “money in” on a session log sheet to see if you are at least breaking even on the Camp director’s or class teacher’s salary. Mid course corrections on the kind of field trips you offer can keep the camp operation in the black. Work with your camp director by suggesting sustainable expenditure levels. While it is nice if contractual activities show a little profit that can be moved to your general fund column at the end of each session, it is most important to give useful, inexpensive service to your patrons. If you are a dollar ahead at the end of camp season and everyone had a good time, you have done a great job.**

**The “ultimate water fight” was always a popular activity. We learned to offer an alternative indoor choice for customers who did not want to get wet. Water was kept on the lawns. There were designated “fill-up” areas. No wet pavement or restroom floors were tolerated. I set up an old rain bird sprinkler circled by cones for a romp on the lawn. The itinerary made clear that a towel and dry change of clothes were to be brought that day by participants, along with their water toys. We liked a controlled water balloon toss activity, and offered “the world’s largest slip and slide!” Be careful if you allow water balloons. They sting.**

**A day camp contractor may have no staff members who can change an adult diaper on an older camper with special needs. You will do your very best to reasonably meet every challenge. You specified logo staff shirts, but what if a day camp employee arrives in revealing attire, wearing large hoop earrings which could catch on something, or open toed spike heels? What if the camp director shows “Halloween III?” Have you thought of everything? In time, the biggest question may boil down to “Who is buying chicken for the end of Summer barbeque?”**

**The one idea I used throughout was to have an outstanding field trip at Spring break so we would be remembered and used all Summer. The Moms do your word of mouth advertising for you if the kids go home happy and tired. The big activity has to be something to look forward to each day. Small activities address the needs of different groups.**

**While children's camps present lots of challenges, classes simply need a certain amount of paying customers to stay in business. Teachers may want a percentage of the class sign-up profits, which could be good for all concerned. I would give 80% to 90% of enrollment fees to a teacher, and put 10% in the general fund. Extra money in the activity column could eventually buy mirrors for dance, or a balance beam for the gymnastics class. If they have a large group, the center's percentage could be quite substantial.**

**One person per program is paid as the independent contractor. The contractor is not treated as an employee for their services, or for Federal or State tax purposes. A tax professional will give advice if needed. We submitted 1099 forms to the IRS for those earning over \$600 per year, with copies to the contractor as soon after January 1<sup>st</sup> as possible. Contractors are responsible for paying their taxes, and reporting the earnings of their employees.**

**Small business insurance providers must be independently contacted by contractual providers for bids on the insurance your department defines as necessary for their operation. If a contractor pressed me for advice, the most I would ever suggest is that using a subsidiary of a large insurance company might be a good idea. Remember that the contractor must be independent, so you do not run their business for them. They are responsible for the actions of their employees.**

**Part time recreation employees can supplement their income by offering contractual programs. Help a staff member learn how to go to the county administration building for a business license. They can register a fictitious name, like "Kathi's Kamp," for a small fee. Local laws about publishing the name will vary, but county employees will guide them. Your trusted associate can be a real help to local residents.**

As camp director I “brown bagged it” with my campers one day to sound them out. I wanted to be sure their experience was the best I could provide. Younger ones, especially, are so curious about any new adult. They were all flattered that I was honestly interested in how they felt about the program. A flood of answers came when I asked what had been their favorite field trips, and which ones ought to be avoided in the future. An eight year old girl, back for her second Summer, spoke boldly. I was very surprised that our “big ticket” to a famous theme park amounted to standing in long lines on hot asphalt for this child. She said “I’m little, and that ground was hot.” We all agreed to change to shady spots, and destinations which included safe water play during the hot months of July and August. Our two annual “luaus” were identical picnics at the water’s edge, and they became favorite trips.

Then there was the “cracker-jack” day camp director who sat down on a park bench to do his 2:00 PM head count halfway through the day at a major theme park. Our hero was shocked, flabbergasted, and lost for a reply when a lonely camper leaned toward him, plaintively calling him by name, and said “play with me.” That director realized during our de-briefing that human interaction in the form of carefully presented lawn games might have been more fun for the child. Over the years our field trips focused on the group. Simple objects of play and personable staff were the real key elements. One of my camp directors, a Mom, flatly told me that she was keeping field trips close to our park. She felt that trips to famous attractions were best for family outings.

Low attendance, or the inability to pay may cancel many offerings, but your creativity may sometimes allow you to see a possible alternative. In the case of a piano teacher, and a small yoga group, lack of money caused the instructors to choose an alternative title of group leader, and offer the experience for free. Both “teachers” were just good folks who wanted to share what they enjoyed doing, so they decided to donate their time. One tot class experienced so much failure to pay that the presenter could no longer invest their time. I proposed a “Mom and Tot Club,” where parent/caregivers came together to share time with each other and their little ones. They met outdoors whenever possible, with the “tot lot,” and a picnic bench as the only items they used.



**Winter holiday camp became almost a “loss leader” in the vernacular of the market place. So many families only need a few days of care during the school holiday because they were doing the traditional vacations to relatives for their special celebrations. Families appreciate the service. We wanted to keep families coming our way so the groups in Spring and Summer remained large. We broke even by having simple crafts, baking gingerbread, serving breakfast “With a Jolly old Elf,” and “new toy day,” which must be supervised very carefully. Have videos at the ready, because it is going to rain! Indoor tournaments can include monopoly, ping pong, pick up sticks, or crazy 8’s.**

**There were times when local well behaved children joined the play groups presented by contractors. As our camp used the home facility for blacktop/lawn games, videos, or supervised brown bag luncheons, all local patrons were allowed to share the public spaces whenever possible. Socialization, diverse inclusion, fellowship, and sometimes the extra players you need for a good game joined in, which made it better for everyone. Making new friends enhances the overall experience. Only the field trips are impossible to be extended free to everyone.**

**Some parks in the center of upscale areas enjoy great contractual success by presenting even seasonal youth sports leagues for profit with gaudy uniforms and high school association referees, also in uniform. Their day camps are famous for going on two elaborate field trips each week! It is wonderful when a community around a park can afford such amenities. One of the most established such centers I know is near humble dwellings that upscale locals call “the servant’s quarters.” The high dollar programs are simply not for the children living there, only a few hundred yards from all the fun.**

**I wanted the best, most affordable camp anywhere. Even though we cost half as much (or less!) than some other camps, we still needed that big “calling card” field trip early in the season. We always went to the County Fair on the free “kid’s day” to offset the cost of the theme park outing. We might go to a big water park once as it got warmer. The “bling” trips got us known, but long term success, and trust, grew from friendly staff getting the details right. We were there for everyone.**

**I always scheduled myself to work late on days when the camp left our park on a field trip. It is desirable at the return destination to have a responsible employee keeping open restrooms clean, and answering questions. Our itinerary had the stated time of return, but unforeseen traffic conditions can affect bus travel time. The group leader kept us informed of such unpredictable delays by cell phone. We learned to be totally pleasant at the end of a long day because everyone is tired. If you are working with youngsters in a day camp type of group, wait till the following morning to point out the need for listening, sharing, or solving problems peacefully. At sign-in time the camper will “get the look” from a busy parent/caregiver hurrying off to work. The best part is pick-up time that evening when you can honestly report acceptable behavior, and that the child had a good day. Everyone appreciates your efforts to keep things nice in a friendly way.**

**Work to support, and do not ever undercut, the authority of camp staff. Children have to follow instructions to be kept safe. If you see a group leader “just letting it happen,” put the burden on the participants to stay with the leader. I took the most helpless or youngest group when I lead field trips. The kids with the “fast legs” were put with a high mobility counselor so they could be the group “on the move.” As I moved into administration I saw things in my contractual programs that I felt compelled to address. The problem was that I had no direct control. I hit upon a shared journal, kept in an office desk drawer for communication between municipal employees and contractors. We would make observations, describe needs, or raise concerns, and check for replies at quiet moments during our day. Parent issues, undesirable behaviors, or worrisome situations got addressed without interruptions or much conversation. This is a “beefs or bouquets” book, so be sure to enter compliments -- or say thank you -- whenever warranted.**

**Other day camp issues: Your department ought to have a policy regarding the application of sun block. Correct use is crucial. Walking trips to nearby locations are fun. Have a responsible person at the front, middle, and end of the group. Youngsters walk with a partner. Count participants often. Very young participants who need a nap or cuddle in the early afternoon need a 1 to 1 “sitter” that they provide.**

**Gently but firmly do what is best for the children. Mom may carry the sleeping two year old that “just had to come” on your big field trip all afternoon. They both end up having a memorable time because of your cheerful, yet firm approach. Be a student of people. A busy Mom assured us that her 7 year old was “a genius,” and quite capable of applying his own sun block. On the fourth day of his participation, we noticed that the tops of his ears were quite sunburned. The mother went ballistic, claiming we had neglected to supervise her genius as sun block was applied. It ended up ok, but a hard truth I learned was to have a nurturing “Mom” sort of woman on the day camp staff. This type of gentle oversight ends up helping kids and their Moms be winners in your programs. It also answers the question I heard more than once: Where is the woman I’ll be trusting with my child?” None of this is right or wrong; a diverse staff including both genders is best. Have a simple trip, even a short nature walk, with campers before the “big” trip. Learn your individuals, and get them following instructions.**

**On field trips, call the roll before leaving. Carry the roster, including contact information, for all participants on the trip. There are aluminum clip boards with flip open storage compartments which work well. Do another roll call when you reach the destination. Be clear on each counselor’s group members. Make sure everyone knows when and where the entire group meets in the middle of the day. Reiterate the final time and place to meet for return to your park. Call the roll each time the group meets. Do not leave anyone behind! Limit the amount of money campers can bring for lunch and souvenirs. Drop your trip ratio to 8 to 1 or lower with extra staff, or parent/caregiver volunteers.**

**Fliers, and itineraries, must be “fool proof.” It all has the name of your operation across the top. Proof read everything. Do not let contractors get by with late submissions. Details of day to day operations must give participants the opportunity to go to the dentist, for example, and then know where to catch up with the group. Wet days, crazy hat contests, or ball games must list clothing, towels, accessories, or perhaps that it is time to “bring your bat and glove.” Personal items, including back packs, jackets, sports equipment, toys, or anything else a youngster might bring and put down ought to be marked with an indelible pen.**

**Hard experience is not as good a teacher as having offered contractual classes yourself, and worked at a day camp prior to becoming the administrator. Establish procedures for all contractual presentations. How are customers charged if young day campers are picked up late? Is there a mechanism for older day campers to “sign themselves out” at the end of the day. Do participants get a make-up session if they missed a meeting they paid for. How will refunds be handled? Is there an administrative fee if a participant cancels, and asks for a refund? Perhaps you will waive a penalty fee or graciously schedule a make-up day with sufficient lead time, or a doctor’s excuse. What is your policy if you get a check returned because of non-sufficient funds? Require that incidents and accidents be reported in writing by the independent contractor in charge at the time of occurrence. Then you complete the standard form. You keep some measure of control by requiring that all contracts be renewed -- possibly rewritten -- at least annually.**

**Signed contractor payroll time sheets must be complete with name, dated pay period, and the account column in your ledger to be billed. Show days/hours worked, and rate of pay. The agent who hired the contractor then signs and dates the sheet to approve payment. Record the number of the check used for payment. It is the same principle of shared verification as your vouchers signed by two board members. This methodology is used to pay sports officials/umpires, basketball scorekeepers/score board operators, and class/camp Manager/Owners. All of them provide service as independent contractors.**

**Remember that you are the monitor. All the money in and out of your public account must be right to the penny. You may create registration lists to record each participant with the title of the experience at the top of the page. Make spaces for the inclusive dates of record on each sheet. There are columns to show how each participant paid, the amount, and check number. Record dates and times, such as half day or extended day, as applicable. Note any applicable surcharges or fee waivers. Add the official receipt number, and a space for the initial of the employee making the entry. Good forms list the instructor, and leave space to total columns at the bottom of the page. Check it all. Have everyone get used to putting checks and cash in the safe immediately.**

## **YOUR FACILITY'S CARETAKER**

**Your Gardener/Maintenance/Caretaker is by far the most important individual in your park. Imagine a week with no attention to restrooms, no trash removal, and no general cleaning of the site. A park is quickly dangerous -- even unusable -- without the constant attention of your maintenance staff. You and the rest of the recreation workers must clean up after yourselves, and address the clutter/litter/spills, so the professional can focus on the big jobs. You are nothing without competent park maintenance, the real workers in Recreation Parks!**

**Your maintenance counterpart watches over the paved areas, the landscape, primitive areas, and buildings as you focus on the human population. Give this person mutual respect as a fellow professional. The third member of the lead group is the manager you both share, who facilitates both of your efforts. As this trio focuses on the work at hand, you become colleagues. Each one does their part as an equal in all the ways that matter day to day. Any good manager will make certain that the maintenance staff gets respect -- they know the difficulty in finding dedicated professionals to fill those classifications.**

**The maintenance worker may dump and re-bag thirty full trash cans, clean up blood, bodily waste, broken glass, and then pause to safely dispose of a discarded syringe as dawn breaks on a Monday. It is a tough, physical job which must be faced with sore muscles, nagging injuries, or the sniffles in good weather and bad. Let them know what you are charged with counting and inspecting. Enforce policy without surprise inspections. Your total commitment in support of a diligent maintenance person is proper deference to their crucial work product.**

**I was lucky enough as a part time employee to be used as a fill-in caretaker for up to eight weeks at a time. I learned about water shut-off valves, ball valves, gate valves, automatic sprinkler valves, back flows, sprinkler adjustments, and replacements. I learned to set a bayonet fitting in a quick coupler for a rain bird or hose bib. I became able to operate sprinkler control boxes, light timers, and circuit breaker boxes.**

Upon becoming the front line supervisor of a park, you can be sure my staff understood how to spot leaks and turn off the correct valve. Staff working nights and weekends knew the difference between irrigation and potable water. The emergency procedures binder on the desk had pages with drawings of where valves were, what they controlled, and how to turn them off. Be sure you have the simple wrench handy for everyone so natural gas can be turned off in a emergency. Assume nothing. “Clockwise closes the valve” may have to be posted over a shut-off valve, and highlighted in the emergency binder. Ask your maintenance person for training on the location of crucial control points. Use spray paint to identify control boxes outside, and interior signs, to label important features on the emergency drawings. Mark everything in plain English, and other languages as necessary. Trying to figure out a faded water drawing while a big leak is ruining a field or the gym floor is unnecessary -- the kind of incompetence we ought not be capable of! Usually there is no need to cut water to restrooms if a drinking fountain is found to be leaking. Turning off all the water to a park if the sprinklers are leaking is a rookie mistake. Disaster victims using recreation lawns as emergency sleeping areas had just set up tents and spread out blankets when the sprinklers went on: It really happened! Staff must also be able to turn off cycles in the sprinkler box if there is a sudden rain storm. Valuable water must not be wasted.

Water and lawns are conserved in consultation with the caretaker. Our “world’s largest slip and slide” was nothing more than an 8’ X 40’ sheet of smooth, heavy plastic from the home improvement store. We laid it down across a soft, gently sloping lawn in our picnic area. I first brought the idea to my maintenance worker, who thought we could use it once a week if we changed locations. We were lent a hose and quick coupler so we could keep our slide wet. The extra water on the lawn meant that sprinkler times had to be lowered for a station at the base of the slope. Two professionals worked together to create a safe activity that did not injure the lawn or waste water. The “partnership” lead to a rain bird being fitted to a quick coupler, at the suggestion of maintenance, to let campers “run through the sprinkler” (outside a 10’ protective circle of cones) on hot days. Recreation staff put the hose and fittings away correctly every time! Everyone said “thank you.”

**Inclement weather at the start of the calendar year offers opportunities to meet with your lead maintenance person to develop an annual maintenance plan. As recreation departments mature, maintenance strategies evolve into agreed upon optimum practices. Some ideas are simple. Catch weeds before they blossom, re-seed, and spread. Pull them out by the roots when the ground is moist after a rainy period. Then, spread a heavy layer of mulch in flower beds between the plants you want to keep. Small weeds will “cook” under the mulch as they try to sprout. Similarly, insects are much easier to eradicate in their larval stage. Find, and remove, all their egg sacks. We learned to save large plastic bottle caps, which became “safe” gopher and ground squirrel killing machines. Blend premixed concrete 50/50 with dry oat cereal in a bottle cap, and place it near the rodent hole next to another cap filled with water. The pest eats the cereal mixed with concrete, gets a dry mouth, and drinks the water. Then they go in their hole and die. Back fill the holes to prevent trip hazards in the lawns. It is always best to avoid using poison. Pour boiling water down an ant hill. Learning to identify your flora and fauna facilitates optimum maintenance.**

**Many caretakers have developed their own favorite efficiency shortcuts. Use rakes and leaf blowers by moving with the wind. A large flexible plastic trash can is a great “dust pan.” Rake the leaves into the can pushed flat against the ground. Stand it up, and put the big trash bag down over the can. Flip the can and, holding the bag up, lift the plastic can out of the bag. The slash or cuttings are thus bagged in one step. Tie the top of that bag quickly.**

**The dirty wad of paper plugging your park toilet is easily removed with a “reacher” trash pick-up tool. Ours were aluminum, with a plastic handle, which when squeezed makes two rubber cups come together on the other end of the shaft to grab refuse. Hold the tool with the pistol grip up, and thrust the rubber cups down into the hole in the bottom of your toilet bowl. They will close around the plug some. Grip the handle tightly, and pull the plug out. The worker who showed me this method put the dirty, wet paper in a bucket. I learned to hold the plug above the water, and release it slowly as I flushed the toilet. Wear a face shield and gloves. Mark the pick-up stick reserved for this application.**

**Broken glass is a severe hazard which must be completely removed as soon as it is discovered. You need a small broom, good dust pan, and a small -- bagged -- trash can. Pick up, and then carefully sweep up, every shard and speck of glass. It is extremely sharp, so move slowly and cautiously if you handle large pieces. Walk to the other side of the clean-up area when you think you have gotten all the pieces. Changing light as you circle the break point reflects differently, and reveals more pieces to pick up. Check a good eight to ten feet away in every direction from the bulk of the broken pieces. If the break is next to a lawn, separate the blades of grass carefully to find small shards of glass. Clean out the cracks in the pavement.**

**You will earn honest respect from people who see you address broken glass in a painstaking manner. It does not take long to do it right. Getting the glass off the ground is better and quicker than putting on gloves to pull glass out of a child's foot on a beautiful Summer day! I have pulled out a couple of sharp, long slivers. The maintenance staff will be gladdened by all employees pitching in to keep the park safe.**

**There are a few assists that wise recreation center supervisors give to maintenance staff and park users: After Spring showers end -- as soon as dirt infields are dry enough to walk on -- throw some shovels full of infield dirt into the puddles before they dry up. This is the easiest way to eliminate low spots in your infields. Pull the infield drag clockwise, the opposite way base runners go. That puts the dirt back where it belongs. Stay three feet away from the grass as you drag. Finish with a rake so you do not push infield dirt onto the outfield grass, and cause a lip, or crown, to form where the lawn meets the dirt. Make sure recreation staff knows how to put up new basketball nets. "Empower" them to change out nets when the first strand breaks. All staffers can efficiently paint out graffiti as soon as possible. Paint brushes may be kept wrapped tightly, and sealed in zip lock bags, so they do not have to be cleaned after each use. We paint nice rectangles, not splotches!**

**Get fertilization and aerification on the calendar. Use rain to work a 21-4-4 fertilizer into lawns early in the year. Spread "triple 15" in early and late Summer. Aerate before fertilizing, if possible, and water it in.**



**Have a top soil pile of one or two yards of dirt in a corner so it does not become a BMX bike ramp. Use this to fill in low spots on lawns. You can look at a field leveled with sand during the rainy season, and the sanded patches will be ugly yellow splotches unless fertilized constantly. Sand has no nutrients for the lawn. Do not use infield dirt as top soil.**

**Ask if it is possible to over seed with fescue, or field mix grass seed, to fill in bare spots early enough so new growth lawn is ready for Spring foot traffic. Make sure you have a box of department approved grass seed. Keep a bag of good turf fertilizer safely in a metal trash can locked in the work shed. Fix lawns correctly with good soil and seed. You may rope off a new growth spot for a period of weeks before and after the heavy use part of the year, and use extra water there.**

**Old hands are crucial when laying sod over bare dirt, or putting in a new field on plain dirt. Lay sod on wet earth. Throw some Turf Supreme, or similar fertilizer under the new layer. If you have the honor to create a new park lawn or playing field, lobby hard for compost to be mixed with the gypsum typically used to soften bare dirt (hard pan) before planting a new lawn. The compost will get a layer of top soil going under your new field, resulting in a thicker, healthier lawn which will mature to a stable playing surface much sooner.**

**Encourage your maintenance specialist to water six (!) times a week. Sound impossible? Take the proscribed watering time, divide by three nights, and then divide each night in half to create six very short watering cycles. All the water will soak in to the landscaped areas. Less water per cycle eliminates puddles, which lead to runoff. Keep the water on the “green,” with at least a couple of sprinkler system checks per year. Ask to observe a system check. Field watering is an art. Correctly designed systems will have overlapping coverage. Look for “donuts” of thick dark green grass around poorly working sprinklers, and arcs of yellow lawn that are getting less water. Learn to read water drawings. Verify that correct size sprinklers are mounted as per the plan. Make sure your specialist is trained in the use of a soil probe, so watering can be backed off if the ground becomes too moist. Maintenance puts up flags early, and rec. staff lowers them at sundown.**

**Except in matters of imminent danger, do not distract maintenance workers who are operating power tools, machinery, or engrossed in hard physical labor. You could cause an injury, or diminish their opinion of you as a supervisor. It is safe -- and a sign of respect -- to wait until a working person has a break in the action to communicate with them. You want them to concentrate on the job, so avoid being counterproductive in any way.**

**The supervisor keeps an eye on maintenance folks to insure their safety. Verify proper training, and personal protective equipment. Learn their “beat” cycle of regular repeating tasks. Catch up with them on your rounds of the park to see how things are going, and ask if they have everything they need. I found one lying under a tree at break time on a hot Summer day. They occasionally “hide” in sheds, but be judicious in your admonitions, since you are only seeing that the work gets done! It is better that they “take 10” in the office looking at forms with you than lounging in public. It is good to have a binder to look at if the worker is tired, and needs to sit for a brief period. Use the time to check the annual plan, but gently. Be sure they have sun block, and a good hat. Use their official title when the two of you are interacting with members of the public. Thank people for what they do, and mean it!**

**Help your employee organize their paperwork by offering binders, office supplies, and office space as you listen to their needs, reasonable requests, and vision for the site you operate together. There are times when you must defer to the needs of maintenance. Get them a large calendar for their tool storage area. Give friendly reminders.**

**It is not micromanagement to tell the maintenance specialist that “when we get to craft clean-up time at 4:15 PM, I need there to be two large empty “bagged” trash cans at the ends of the tables so we don’t leave a mess.” By communicating what is best for the site, fellow employees come to see that you have internalized the program for the good of all. The maintenance person may reply “you know, we will need more trash bags soon.” Perfect! Both of you are putting the site, and park patron’s needs, uppermost in your minds. Learn how to do every job necessary for your park to be a success. You will then be a competent supervisor.**

**Consider readying a dirt infield for baseball or softball play. The dirt must be deep dragged (“peg dragged”) level, at the start of the work shift, if possible. Deep drag right after watering the dirt so the vehicle pulling this heavy drag does not bog down. It is wise to deep drag at the end of every rain storm to loosen the soil. Experienced groundskeepers use their weather eye, and put their toe on the infield dirt, while waiting for the field to dry sufficiently so they “do no harm.” They deal with footprints, ruts, and runoff patterns. Get a feel for their craft by being watchful. Learn to “work the field” from a pro.**

**The field gets a light drag, or screen drag, in early afternoon. Make sure the dirt is moist enough to avoid putting dust clouds in the air. Screen drag every day. Ideally we deep drag weekly, but sometimes a field can go a week without deep dragging. Supply a 4’ aluminum field rake for manicuring the batter’s boxes, in front of the pitcher’s rubber, sliding areas, around the outfield edge, and where the shortstop plays.**

**Set the top of the base pegs more than an inch below the dirt infield surface. It is important to have pegs under the dirt enough to be certain they are covered if the infield has more than one set of pegs. You may have three sets of pegs on a field if different age groups play there with different diamond dimensions. Put a spot of paint on the fence near the buried peg to help you find it quickly. Home plate is mounted to a large piece of wood buried in the ground. Make sure it sits flat and flush. Replace the “plate” every two or three years. Check to see it is not a trip hazard. Sometimes wet dirt must be worked into foot holes in the batter’s boxes early enough in the day so it is dry by game time.**

**Then put your foul lines and “commit lines,” if necessary for softball, down. I made the simplest possible batter’s boxes, with a front line, and the line parallel with home plate. Similarly, I ran a 10’ coach’s box well in foul territory close to 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> with a 3’ limit line back from the home plate end of the line. Let each league be responsible for everything but the most basic lines to avoid controversy. Experienced leaders have a big ball of twine wound around an old large standard screw driver to set the string where long lines go. Paint is the only way to go on lawn. We used chalk on dirt, but new methods will emerge.**

If necessary, a *light* watering of the dirt about 20 minutes prior to the first pitch is the crowning touch. The infield dirt ought to be moist “to spike depth” at game time. Your staff must not be expected to make fields “perfect,” but there can be no “sink holes” to catch a foot in the outfield. If the field is safe, and experienced users are happy, you have done well. Make sure there are fresh bags in trash cans, and no protruding fence wires. After many years, I finally got a few wire fence ties, and kept chain link fence wires from scraping anyone by bending loose ends into the fabric with channel lock pliers. Use the wire ties to secure the folded ends. Close or lock gates as appropriate. Play ball!

A field being used regularly could need an additional 3 to 7 cubic yards of infield dirt per year. Find out if management wants input from your user groups on the type of clay based infield dirt they prefer.

Similarly, you may have to add #30 to #50 clean, properly washed, playground sand to your “tot lot” sand box. A foot of soft sand is ideal around play structures, especially the “fall zone” areas at the bottom of slides, ladders, or stepping off points. Interestingly, the sand itself was identified by youngsters as their “favorite toy” in the tot lot!

In the case of infield dirt, or clean sand, you will have to find your square footage to be covered, and determine how many inches you want to raise the surface. Measure the leveled area to be raised in feet. Multiply the length times width, and get the number of square feet to be raised. Multiply the square footage using this table depending on the number of inches you wish to raise the overall surface:

One inch up multiply by .08	Two inches up multiply by .16
Three inches up multiply by .25	Four inches up multiply by .33
Five inches up multiply by .41	Six inches up multiply by .50
Seven inches up multiply by .58	Eight inches up multiply by .67
Nine inches up multiply by .75	Ten inches up multiply by .83
Eleven inches up multiply by .91	Twelve inches up multiply by 1.0

Finally, divide your result by 27 to get cubic yards, the way it is sold.

**Test your ability to use the above applied math by figuring how much sand you must add to a 10' x 20' sand box to raise the overall level 3 inches. Multiply 10 feet times 20 feet to get 200 sq. ft. Since you want to go up 3 inches, find the multiplier .25 in the table.  $200 \times .25 = 50$ . Divide 50 by 27, and find that you need 1.85 cubic yards to go up exactly 3 inches. Order two cubic yards and you will be fine.**

**Kidney shaped sand boxes and infields that curve where the dirt meets the outfield grass are hard to measure perfectly, so order a little extra material. The trick is breaking down the overall area to be measured into rectangles and triangles. Get a couple of extra cubic yards of infield dirt to keep out of play behind the backstop, yet inside the field fence, for filling holes and low spots.**

**Get an expert opinion on the coverage, and life expectancy of your ball field light bulbs. The Illuminating Engineering Society of North America standards mandate 50 foot candles of light in your infield, and 30 in the outfield, or across your football field. Night lighting of your multipurpose court must be an even 20 to 30 foot candles. Older bulbs will take on a yellowish color. Light covers must be clean. Be sure your infield area is brightly lit, and that you have safe, even light across the entire field of play. Have a qualified vendor measure your foot candles.**

**Optimum care of linoleum floors in public buildings is a painstaking job requiring several mops, proper buffer pads, compatible chemicals, and well trained staff. Some caretakers enjoy bringing a high luster to their floors and hallways. Find out what materials, time, and training they need to perform up to departmental standards. Ask your maintenance professional to help train all staff in how to get up day to day spills correctly. Use properly treated dust mops to keep these floors clean. Protect those arduously stripped, waxed, and buffed floors properly day to day, or the people responsible for their appearance will certainly make their concerns known! Do a floor start to finish with your caretaker to learn the job. Then you can fully appreciate the need to protect their "sweat equity." You will learn a new reason to be very grateful when you see a shiny floor. Supervisors can get the right entry way mats, and limit patron use patterns that scuff clean surfaces.**

## **TAXONOMY OF INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS**

**We offer an invitation to join us by creating action. The leader attracts attention by joining in the ongoing activity, or presenting an experience. Bubble mania was an activity I used as my “calling card” in a new area, an element of “family day,” to draw attention for flier distribution, or occasionally when the park was full of active children. I made large bubbles, and, of course, gave the process a pleasing memorable name.**

**There are very fine commercially available bubble wands. You can make your own out of two dowel sticks and long strips of half inch wide high quality towel. Notch the dowel ends, and insert strips so a continuous triangle of absorbant fabric is created when the ends are separated. The top strip between my dowels is 17 inches of fabric. The bottom of the fabric loop, 40 inches long, is weighted with a heavy key ring that slides freely in the loop. Glue your cloth in the notches.**

**Use a 5 gallon plastic bucket to mix your bubble fluid: 1 cup of blue dawn “ultra” original scent liquid dish detergent per 8 cups of water. Mix up 27 cups of fluid slowly and carefully as you pour detergent into the water in stages, a half cup at a time. Do not make the liquid suds up. Stir in a couple of tablespoons of clear karo syrup slowly to the full amount, and let stand over night.**

**Get your “wand” full of liquid with the dowel ends together, so the soaked fabric clings all together. Raise the cloth out of the bucket. Move the dowel ends apart, then back together, to make big bubbles. Use the breeze, or turn slowly, to move bubbles out of your wand. Kids run after your bubbles. People smile -- hand them a quarterly flier!**

**Learn about kite making at the library, or on the internet. Produce small two stick kites. The spines and crosses are thin bamboo, or dry twigs. Tissue paper or newspaper covers your kites, and cotton sewing thread is “kite string.” Ribbon scraps make the tail. Cut and notch the spines and crosses at your desk with a sharp knife. Patrons help build at an activity table set up near your office door. They get a kite!**









The same activity table can hold a Connect 4 game, chess, or soft plastic pick-up sticks with ball ends. Challenge patrons to a game. One will be a serious dominoes player, while the next patron may want to stand the “bones” in a row to watch them fall in order. An old jump rope may turn out to be an impromptu “limbo” bar -- be flexible. Post league schedules on your bulletin board. Your center’s teams enjoy seeing their league standings on display in the office window. Make standings boards out of card stock with pockets for team names, wins, and losses. These boards can also hold ladder tournament names. Be sure your fliers are current, neat, attractive, and available. Stack donated magazines near the check-out counter for people to enjoy in the shade. These actions all created comment. Conversation is an activity.

One of my postings began right after Labor Day. I needed to focus the attention of a large teenage group on the distribution of my flag football fliers. I entered their midst with a new football tucked under my arm -- fundamentally correct -- like a ball carrier. The fliers were in my other hand. They all just wanted the ball. I smiled, and said “Take a flier, you’ll get the ball.” The flier featured attractive logos, and the invitation to join for free by returning the signed permission slip. Prospective players were invited, on that one sheet, to list their own team, or enter a draft as an individual. We got twenty two teams. Team captains were organized to earn community service by refereeing games.

Members of that high spirited group did try to punch the ball out of my grasp a couple of times. It drew a chuckle from me, and smiles all around. As individuals read the sheet, some immediately began thinking of getting friends together as a team. You have to know your limitations, since your outreach must be cheerful, relaxed, and totally self assured. There is no choice but to believe “I can do this,” so only do what you can! Know your group: At another location I simply put the same type of flier on the counter, and mentioned it was available. As a student of diversity, I had learned that their group’s cultural imperative was to get things for themselves. Inviting those prospective players to pick up their own sheet, and not take it out of my hand, brought a comfort level that lead to great success.

**Start a tradition of motivated usage by posting the rules to wall ball. Make a positive impression by taking a turn. In wall ball, the server strikes the volleyball against the ground, it hits legally off the wall, bounces back, and you sock it to bounce back off the wall. Get in line. Learn ground rules -- what is “in” -- and accept the group’s rule modifications. Servers state what is legal for the current pairs match. “Babies” is a small hit designed to stop near the wall. “Popcorn” is hitting the ball up repeatedly before playing it back off the ground to the wall. “Bettors” may be called to get a better serve. Winners stay on as server. Sometimes there is great negotiation on fine points: Civics in action! Respect local rules: Do not referee, just make sure the basic rules, special ground rules, and modifications are clearly understood.**

**Candy Land and Monopoly “work.” Mature patrons enjoy bridge. A simple, rapid, card game we called “snap” held youthful interest. Two players sit across from each other, and are dealt seven cards. Split the deck in two stacks face down with room between them for two cards to be placed face up. Players watch each other, and turn over a card from their right hand stack, at the same moment, into the middle area leaving two cards face up side by side. Then, quick as you can, play your cards of immediately higher or lower value on either face up pile as long as you can. When neither player can put a card down, they pick up a card from their face down stack again. Put any card you cannot play in your hand. Turn over face up stacks to keep the game going until a player wins by putting down their last card. Learn to move quickly.**

**You may show videos, though there seemed to be more and more rules. I had success showing “Beethoven,” which has a big, slobbering dog. Groups enjoyed Disney’s true life adventure called “The Living Desert,” as well as “Nemo,” and their cartoon version of “Robin Hood.”**

**Croquet is fun in the shade on a warm day, but needs constant adult supervision. Sets get ruined quickly unless you model correct usage. Check-out items include a hacky sack, old tennis balls, a Frisbee, a soccer ball, 28” and 32” aluminum bats, 4 flat throw down bases, a red bouncy playground ball, a rubber volleyball, an intermediate football, 10” and 12” softballs, a basketball, a deck of cards, and pick up sticks.**

Have only one good example of most check-out items available, and less items will disappear over time. Other pieces to keep on hand are a couple of whistles, a ball pump and air filler needles, large and youth sized soccer “game” balls, the “hand me down” catcher’s mask from youth baseball, at least 18 soft “knee high” PVC traffic cones and 4 “thigh high” cones, twenty team sets of red and twenty team sets of yellow “tack - a - flag” or similar football flags with belts, a couple of 12” whiffle balls and bat, “T-ball” batting tee, three 5 gallon plastic buckets (clean), tumbling mats, jacks, bean bags, a couple of short jump ropes, a good tether ball, and hop scotch lagers. Be ready to start a game if you coalesce a play group. Hop scotch is still great social fun.

The rest of your equipment is amassed so that you have the proper implements to be sure your unique site can be used in an optimal way. If you have a pond that freezes, you had better keep a couple of pucks, and get a working knowledge of “Hudson Bay Rules.” If your site has a ball diamond, I urge you to study the presentation of overhand fast pitch youth softball, “10 inch,” as described in the following section. Collect a bag of sand toys. A venerable favorite, “table golf,” worked all over my town throughout my career. It is a flat board game that sits on a clean metal trash can near the office, and is used until it wears out.

Find out if your department has a parachute (medium size is best), a big “earth ball,” and a thick hawser type tug-o-war rope. These last are fun to check out and use in nice weather. Watch a DVD on parachute play. Be sure to do “popcorn” where everyone raises and lowers their part of the cloth quickly in random fashion to make little ripples. Then as one youngster crawls around under the parachute, another runs around on top playing “tag.” It is fun to raise the parachute up as a group, step in, and sit down together “inside.” We had fun raising and lowering around the circle to keep a volleyball rolling around on top of the parachute. It is fun to “spin” the parachute by passing it quickly to one side for a few seconds, and then back the other way. Get ideas from the web, along with rules for Kick the Can, and Capture the Flag. We learned to allow no “guarding” of the “jail” in Capture the Flag. Requiring every player to get after the flag just works better. Make yourself a nice “flag,” and a rag ball “can.” Keep five new gunny sacks.

**There are a couple of “Ridiculous Relays” you must try! You will need two big straw hats, two clean sweatshirts, and two clean pairs of sweat pants. Get two even teams, and set up your pairs of cones about 15 to 20 yards apart depending on the age group. First they race with just the hats, and you can only touch the hat to put it on. Naturally, as they run up and back the hat blows off their heads, and you get a crowd “whoop.” Participants learn to tilt the hat against the wind, and run a little slower. Then you add the sweat clothes. Each participant suits up, runs the course, and passes the hat, pants, and shirt to the next runner who suits up and goes. The hurried dressing and removal of outer garments becomes a real slap stick comedy that they all enjoy. Follow with the water balloon toss. Fill a bucket with water balloons ahead of time. Partners play catch, stepping back one step after each toss.**

**Play my favorite “new” game, Monsters in the Dark! The group of pre-teens stands in front of you on a nice piece of lawn. It is like “Simon says.” First, identify a landmark to their left and right sides, such as “the canyon,” or “the mountain.” Say “go to the canyon,” and they begin walking in that direction. When you say “go to the mountain,” they change direction and go the other way. There are three more commands: “Big birds” means dive on your belly because a flock of giant birds is swooping towards us. “Tidal wave” means hug the person closest to you so you do not get swept overboard. “Monsters in the Dark” makes everyone freeze so the monsters will not hear them. Issue commands in rapid succession and different sequences. Cross them up by saying “Go to the canyon,” for example, twice in a row. Any hesitation or starting to do the wrong motion makes the caller say the name of the errant participant, who sits down beside them. When you get the last two participants, the rest of the group becomes very watchful. They will want to play three or four rounds the first time, and ask to play again.**

**Scavenger hunts need only a clean bag for each two person team, and a photocopied sheet of things they can find around your area. I added an autograph space on the sheet of things to find for the signature of a “working person.” Our neighborhood letter carrier was thrilled to give all the children an autograph!**

Crafts normally ought to be accomplished in one session. I had the honor of replacing a crafting legend at one of my postings. Back in the day, this leader had been famous for making beautiful paper flowers. Unfortunately for me (and the patrons) the leader also jealously guarded all details and patterns for the projects. **BECAUSE I KEPT THE PARK IN MY THOUGHTS, I REMEMBERED THE PAPER FLOWER PROJECT AS I WALKED THROUGH AN ANTIQUE SHOP ON VACATION.** I got an instruction manual for the creation of paper flowers for ten cents! When I came back home I got \$5.00 worth of wire and tissue paper with petty cash. I launched into the activity at a craft table set up just outside my office door on a Saturday morning. My first flowers looked a lot like clumps of paper. Three and a half hours later, virtually all the youngsters ages 6 to 16 had made fairly good paper flowers. Our “carnations” came out best.

Not everyone took their paper flowers away from the craft table. I used the leftovers to brighten bulletin boards, which had announced “**PAPER FLOWER DAY SATURDAY!**” I used some to frame that past leader’s picture, which hung in the office. **THE MAIN INGREDIENT LEADING TO THE SUCCESS OF “THE PAPER FLOWER PROJECT” WAS MY INTENTION TO ENJOY THE ACTIVITY.** I did present the experience in a cheerful, orderly manner. Since it was important to me, it became important to the rest of those who took part. The only thing special about me, or the wonderful leaders who drew me in to this profession, was that we especially liked what we were doing. We joined in the action to ensure a successful experience.

On February 14<sup>th</sup> we folded red paper, and cut out symmetrical Valentine’s day hearts. Cards were made for parent/caregivers at Mother’s Day. Flags were colored on Independence day. Handprint turkeys are fun at Thanksgiving: Draw around your hand on the sheet of green paper. The outline of the thumb is the head of the turkey, with the outstretched fingers being the big bunch of tail feathers. Glue on cut out wattles, claws, beaks, more colored paper feathers, and a wiggly eye. Color with crayons. They are all cute and fun. One group loved to draw, so young artists were featured at an art show in our end of Summer “Round-Up.” The art show is still part of their Summer event.

**Non athletes will enjoy Crazy Hat Day: They bring an old hat, to which is glued found items, craft scraps, and any odds ‘n ends to make a cute or silly hat. This is a good contest for preteens. Use a video recorder to make a record of the contest. Make popcorn to sit back with the group to judge the results. Everyone enjoys seeing themselves on television.**

**Use your video camera for “screen tests,” where a box of simple props is provided on a table, and patrons act with them for about a minute each. Set up a dance area, and record individuals, or groups. Take some wide shots of general activities around the park, and enjoy the video together.**

**More involved videos included tumbling, scenes from our cross country course, and young day campers taking turns reading a story book. We made a “film,” with a clean floor mop in the lead role, written by the participants as they went along.**

**No equipment? Play Rock-Paper-Scissors, Twenty questions, hide and seek, or tag. We “invented” shadow tag one sunny day, and made hand shadows on the pavement. “Manhunt” is two groups of equal foot speed playing hide and seek within set boundaries. Players “win braggin’ rights” by getting back to home base before being tagged by the other team. When everyone is tagged, “home,” or wins by staying hidden for about 20 minutes, the other team runs to hide. Very young children enjoyed “Lava Monster” in the tot lot. Children would scoot around raised portions of the play structure as the leader tried to tag them on the shoe. Some parks supply a sheet with a check list of tasks, and things to find. There is a picture to color. Youngsters submit their finished sheet to a staff member, and become a “junior ranger.”**

**When you get down to making bunnies and birds on the pavement with hand shadows, rain clouds will surely interrupt the flow. Something always happens! Watching you react to changing situations is part of the playground’s ongoing civics lesson. As the group huddles under cover waiting for rides or a break in the weather you can find out their positive memories, and plan upcoming events. When all else fails you can try my favorite knock knock joke: Knock, knock. *Who’s there?* Alex. *Alex who?* I’ll-ex-plain later!**

**Our kids recycling event was a perfect example of gently promoted fun: The flier promised “Recycle - You Could Win A New Car.” Of course it was a small, non running, plastic car. Participants brought identified recyclable items to be weighed by my borrowed hand held fish scale. Their name, and the weight of their material, was recorded on a big poster. After two weekends, cars were presented to good recyclers. We had enough cars so everyone who participated could “win.”**

**My Sports Cards and Collectables Show was presented for 90 minutes in a large, open room with folding tables and a few chairs. Since children were invited to bring valuable sports cards, I invited beat cops. My poster had the Who, What, When, Where, and Why. It was outlined with sports cards. I inadvertently created great comment by gluing, and ruining, a \$4.00 card to the sign. A local pro athlete signed autographs, and one table was covered with a great many “common” cards, so less fortunate attendees could take some, and start a collection.**

**Begin producing any recreation experience by drawing a line down the middle of a sheet of lined paper. On the left list your order of events, including start and stop times. On the right side of the vertical line list needed materials opposite each program element. The sheet is your check list as you gather materials. It is the basis for announcements on fliers or bulletin boards, as well as you oral reports to staff and public bodies. Put the sheet on your leader’s clip board so you can run the event with no floundering or things forgotten. Enjoy the moment, delegate simple chores, and limit distractions in a pleasantly firm manner. Your poise helps patrons trust you, and focus on the activity.**

**Preparation is crucial as the messy potential increases for such things as finger-painting. Cover the activity table with butcher paper taped to the underside around the edge. We used plastic trash bags as vest type smocks with big head and arm holes cut out so the plastic is well away from faces. Paper plates hold only the needed amounts of water based paints in the three primary colors. Newspaper can protect nice floors. Pictures are admired, and moved by staff to a drying table, which may also be covered. The related activity is a child’s handprint placed on an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet, to make a gift, above the photocopied inscription:**

*Sometimes you get discouraged*  
*Because I am so small*  
And always leave my fingerprints  
On furniture and walls.  
But every day I'm growing up  
And soon I'll be so tall  
That all those little handprints  
Will be hard to recall.  
So here's a special handprint  
Just so that you can say,  
This is how my fingers looked  
When I placed them here today.  
Author Unknown

Use a newspaper as a platform for the hand printing process. Keep tearing off the top sheet, so each participant can put their paper on a clean surface. It is nice to have a bucket of clean water, sponge, and paper towels so children can wash paint off their hands.

Leaders can cast small Plaster of Paris holiday ornaments in flexible plastic candy molds. Add a hanger to each one by inserting a bent paperclip into the back before it hardens. After the dry casting is labeled with the name of the artist, and painted with tempera or water colors, set them aside to dry. When patrons are at work or school, hang the ornaments on the chain link fence of an empty field. Spray them with clear enamel so the finished product is shiny. This kind of simple product can be exciting, free, and show pride in careful craftsmanship: Patrons can paint additional ornaments when they have carefully finished the one they are working on. Care in the production of each piece adds many kinds of value to the experience.



Face painting with glycerin based water soluble paint may be enhanced by shading using paraffin wax sticks, and even cosmetics. It involves expense, so it is just mentioned in passing. Our litigious society requires that we use fresh materials specifically identified for the process. You may introduce watercolors and crayons at your activity table as a precursor to face painting in order to find a patron with good brush strokes to present the activity. Then save it for a very special day.

Left over face painting supplies are a wonderful addition when you are helping less fortunate patrons get their last minute Halloween costumes together. Your big Halloween day can include painting faces on small donated pumpkins, musical chairs, possibly a costume walk, and “flying donut eating.” Put small chocolate iced donuts on a loop of thick fishing line, and hang them swinging in the air. This is a funny spectacle, and more sanitary than apple bobbing. Have some “scary” themed music and sounds loaded in your portable stereo.

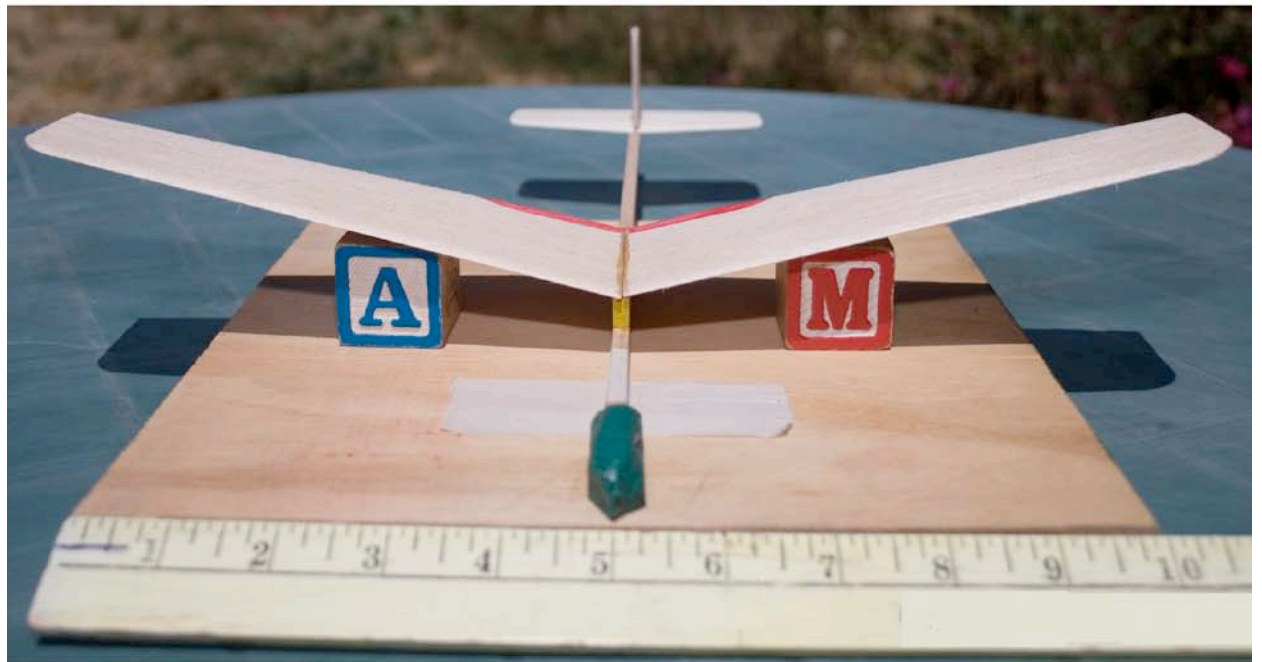
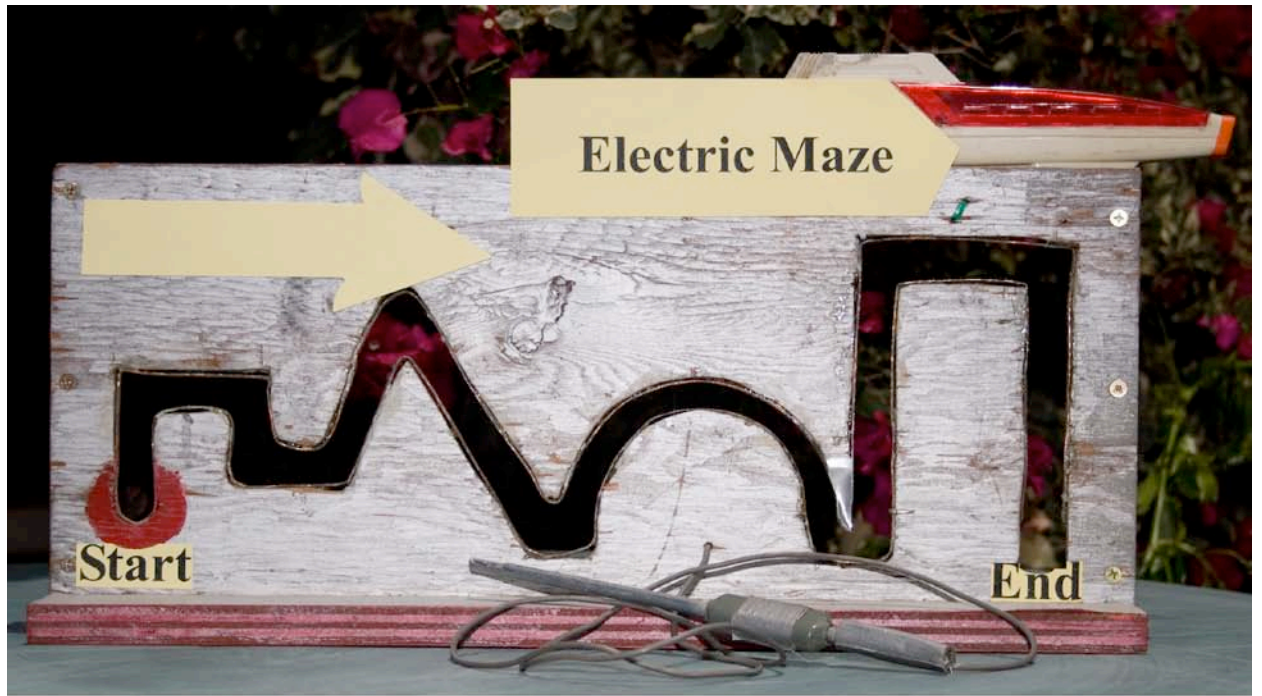
Halloween punch: In a large punch bowl, with ladle, mix a two liter bottle of lemon/lime soda, or “liquid star shine,” with two liters of red punch, or “vampire blood,” and stir in a quart of lime sherbet, the “green slime.” You may wish to float round grapes on the surface -- the “eyeballs.” Provide small paper cups and napkins. A related craft is marble painting, where black painted marbles are rolled on orange construction paper to produce a “web.” Then tape a spider ring in the web. Some participants will wear their spider ring.

Fun houses take lots of experience, as do sock hops. Parent/Caregivers must supervise every room, hallway, alcove, nook, and cranny of the building start to finish. This is non-negotiable, as is absolutely no re-entry for participants who choose to leave the evening event. Watch out for uninvited guests hanging around outside. Dance contests ought to be judged by audience applause. Winners get to start the next dance in front of the group. See if the group, your teen council, wants a conga line, the limbo, or other “fad“ dances. The music must be picked by the age group the dance serves, but screened by staff, to keep your G rated tradition. Have “tidy” treats, and minimal décor. End by 9:00 PM, schedule 20 minutes of clean-up time, and do not be understaffed.

Law enforcement distributed ribbons annually promoting a drug free life style. My stack were prizes in "The Straight Fair," an old style penny carnival. Prevail in one of the hand - eye challenges, and earn your ribbon. We had a bean bag toss through holes in a plywood board. There was a ring toss game. We awarded a win for bouncing a ball over a chair, and into a clean trash can. Our clothes pin drop went into a large traffic cone. The focal point was a narrow maze I cut through a piece of plywood and lined with bare wire. I created a circuit with a radio antenna wired to a toy ray gun, and the wire lining the maze. The circuit would be completed, and sound the toy gun, if a participant touched the sides of the maze while moving the antenna through from end to end. It was noisy fun! So often the brash youngsters who act up get attention, and seem to rule the day. In my "Straight Fair," the quiet, the smaller, and the well behaved drug free youngsters -- including my athletes -- got acknowledged for being proudly drug free. Many left with ear to ear grins. Their ribbon was truly a badge of honor.

Crafts can be more ambitious as you get to know the group. Solid balsa gliders may be mass produced from a reliable plan in three sessions for under \$2.00 per plane. Start by making templates for all the parts from heavy card stock. Cut out wings, stabilizers, rudders, and bodies in the office from 1/16 inch or 1/8 inch thick balsa sheets, and 3/16 X 3/8 inch balsa sticks. The stick bodies can be kite stick material. Bass wood is also good. See if a local glider or radio controlled model plane club is willing to donate scrap, or expertise.

Patrons use 120 grit sandpaper on small sanding blocks to shape their air foil, smooth the body, and reduce drag from the leading edges of rear control surfaces. Build a jig for gluing wings to finished bodies. Quick drying wood glue and magic markers are used to complete the glider. The plane ought to sit level with your fingertips under the front third of each wingtip. Use floral clay to weight the nose. Work until a soft toss glides level. If you have glued the plane with proper alignment, it is possible to affect turns by bending the back edges of the wings (red in following photo) near the body up or down a little. Planes bank by moving these surfaces, called ailerons. You will be a pro after you build a couple of planes, and supervise the first few. Have a fly-in.



**My Autumn preteen play event happened indoors. I used two tumbling mats and several large plastic trash bags full of balloons for clean indoor fun. Inflate four balloons for each invited guest. Stretch a piece of yarn across the room high up for the “net,” and play balloon volleyball. Our relay race was to run across the room carrying a large inflated balloon, and then pop it on the tumbling mat by sitting down on it. If you have no tumbling mats, racers run to a chair, get handed a balloon to blow up, then sit on and pop. Run back to the line to send the next relay racer. You can run several lines at once if you have a row of chairs. Use your cones to set up a short balloon time trial course. On go, participants must bat or kick their balloon around the course. No holding the balloon. This is a fun time to get out your stopwatch. Good judgment on your part will define the format of this event, because a group race could go bad if competitive participants start popping each other’s balloons!**

**Next, partners about the same size and speed each got a balloon with a 3 foot string tied to it. To play “ball and chain,” the strings were tied to each player’s left ankle. On go, partners tried to step on, and pop, each other’s balloon. Action was controlled with a whistle. In successive rounds, winners got new opponents until a champion emerged. Be sure to have plenty of balloons with strings attached ahead of time.**

**The “dance” portion of the event is best kept brief for this age group. Play their pre-approved music for 20 to 30 minutes. Try the “exponential” dance with a shy group. Pick a couple to start. Each time the music stops, about once a minute, every dancer goes and gets another partner until all are dancing.**

**My big finish was an outdoor piñata. Sling your rope over an approved tree branch, or overhang, ahead of time. People go to their knees to pick up candy, so use a clean, soft lawn. It is crucial to have a brown bag full of the same candy that is in your piñata. When the piñata bursts, candy will scatter. Your biggest, fastest -- hungriest (?) -- attendees pounce, and smaller folks get pushed aside. Throw your reserve wrapped candies at their feet. Everyone comes away smiling, because you planned ahead and remained calm. Congratulations!**

There are holidays during the school year when heads of households go to work, and the recreation area can invite students to spend a day at the park. It is a good time to use an old circle mixer game to learn names and spark friendships. Preteens stand around a circle. First the leader, then each individual in turn, steps in, makes a gesture, says their name, and steps back. One will strut in, flex their bicep muscle, and look tough as they say their name. The next will take a little step in, wave demurely, and say their name softly. The fun is that each must copy those that spoke -- including each one's gesture -- before adding their own as they take turns around the circle. Great group leaders will take the first turn, and the last turn, so they repeat all motions and names as a fun way to end the game. You see similar size, speed, and personality types finding each other as the circle breaks up. You have learned, and now must use with a smile, all the names of your new friends.

I learned a wonderful simple challenge at a pioneer day celebration in the great American Southwest. Supervise this event closely, keeping everyone well back from the participants: Opponents sit face to face, gripping a clean sanded shovel or broom handle with both hands shoulder width apart. With knees bent 90 degrees, they place the soles of their shoes against each other. These two folks, about the same size and strength, look like they are set to row a boat in opposite directions with the same oar. On "Go!" both push with the feet as they pull back on the stick. The winner remains seated, while pulling their opponent's "seat" up off the ground (lawn or tumbling mat). Participants must be responsible enough to stop if they hear you blow your whistle. I held the stick between contests. Participation, of course, required a signed permission slip.

Pantomime, charades, and story time worked only occasionally for me. Hula hoops were a big thing at my park during a Summer Olympiad. We staged a different "playground Olympics" event each day so that all of our regular attendees could take turns being the "medalist." I noticed that a small coordinated child could run back and forth through a rolling hula hoop without touching it. He was surprised and thrilled that the "art" he had perfected won him an "Olympic medal."

**A KLUTZ guide, “The Best Paper Airplanes You’ll Ever Fly,” brings magic to a ream of copier paper in an auditorium, gym, or outdoors on a day when the wind is calm. Careful attention to detail gets surprising results, holds interest, promotes interaction, and creates memories.**

**Crayoning is made engrossing by adding little details. Break your crayons in half, and remove the paper sleeves. Then you can make thin, sharp lines, or thick lines with the edges. Shade light or dark with the exposed sides of crayons, and blend two colors by shading over one color with another. Color in areas using dots, struck hard enough to leave extra wax, or softly to make a tiny mark. Get a different effect by filling an area with tiny circles. Photocopies of optical illusions may be colored to make an interesting visual project. Teach drawing or watercolors if you have the talent. The main things we learn in art class are to look long and hard at our subject, and briefly at our “canvas,” as we work from light to dark.**

**Pictures left on the table make a nice bulletin board once you are sure the owners do not want them. Crop finished products with the paper cutter on one or two sides to give the art more balance, emphasize a focal point, and make an interesting display of different sized art pieces.**

**Save pieces of sponge so you can offer sponge painting in a similar format to finger painting. Weaving with jute is involved, but relaxing. We always had a product called pyrolace. Flat, flexible plastic strips were woven to make key chains and lanyards. Once a project takes hold, everyone wants to make an example. A few patrons will want to make all of the different patterns: Your crafty crafters! I found a large supply of beads at a thrift store, which motivated a beading group for the petty cash expenditure of \$4.00.**

**Make play dough that requires no cooking: In a bowl place 1 cup of water, 3 cups of flour, ¼ cup of oil, 1½ cups of salt, and a few drops of food coloring. Mix with hands! If the mass is too sticky, slowly add more flour. After the session, keep your dough for next time in a zip lock bag. You may make a new color of dough for the next two sessions. Shapes to model are in art books at your library, or on the internet.**

**Salt dough art is baked:**

- 1. Pour 1 cup of salt into a bowl.**
- 2. Add 1¼ cups warm tap water to the salt -- stir until the salt dissolves.**
- 3. Add 3 cups of flour (not self rising) to the mixture -- stir.**
- 4. Mix and knead the dough by working it with your hands.**  
Shape and reshape until it is smooth and firm. Form it into a ball.
- 5. Use dough to craft shapes right away. Excess may be refrigerated for up to one week in a covered container or zip lock bag.**
- 6. Preheat oven to 250 degrees.**
- 7. Bake for one hour at 250 degrees.**
- 8. Let cool, then decorate with paint, glue and glitter, or other.**
- 9. THE SALT DOUGH ART IS NOT EDIBLE. Decorated projects may be coated with clear enamel spray as appropriate.**

**One area presented me with a kitchen/business office. My first bulletin board announced “Cooking Class Saturday 10 AM -- Noon. APPLE CREPES this Week! Fee 25 cents per class.” Crepes are a simple recipe that cooks quickly: Put 1½ cups of flour, a table spoon of sugar, ½ teaspoon of baking powder, and ½ teaspoon of salt in your clean mixing bowl. Stir in 2 cups of milk, 2 eggs, a teaspoon of vanilla, and 2 tablespoons of melted butter. Beat your crepe batter until smooth. The group had fun mixing the ingredients while I cut the apples. (All utensils had been washed with dish detergent, rinsed with the hottest water, and air dried. I used fresh ingredients, and disposable food handler gloves.) Cook each crepe in a small, hot, lightly buttered frying pan by pouring in just enough batter to cover the bottom while you tilt the pan “this way and that” to spread the batter thin. Flip the cake to brown it nicely on both sides. It goes on a paper plate, where apple slices, with a sprinkle of cinnamon, are rolled up inside. I finished with a light dusting of powdered sugar on the outside. We ate up every bit. I made several new friends. The cost of materials may have tripled.**

**Your first pancake breakfast is best kept small, perhaps “Breakfast with a Jolly Old Elf” as an RSVP Winter Holiday event. Use Bisquick, and provide 2 strips of bacon or 2 sausages with each stack of pancakes. There are challenges in modern diets, so be ready if people want soy “meat,” or a totally vegan breakfast: fruit salad, and two pieces of toast.**

**Try artsy, perhaps holiday themed, cooking events which invite patrons to decorate fresh baked cookies or cupcakes. Host a tostada party where participants decorate their tortilla with vegetables, meat and cheese to look like faces. Take pictures for that bulletin board!**

**Your cooking group can turn into the fundraising committee. We have funded dances, and a theme park trip, with tamale sales. It came about in a close knit community using a large kitchen at a nearby church where many parents -- including my Mom -- pitched in. At another site, cookie sales funded a bus trip, spearheaded by a high school aged participant with aspirations to become a Navy cook after graduation.**

**A carne asada for your family celebration, or hamburgers and hotdogs for a park full of people is a logistic challenge, and requires experienced planners. Increase the size of your food presentations slowly and thoughtfully as you learn to anticipate and provide for many details. You need a good relationship with nearby food suppliers, who may assist with fees or food preparation as a donation you can recognize formally. Fast food chains sometimes will do a fundraiser at parks, which eliminates County Health Department worries.**

**I had the honor of supervising a mature recreation council that used a legendary pancake breakfast as the basis of their family celebration at the start of each Summer. The group even had a fun “top secret” binder the volunteers used to record the history and methodology of their breakfast, which included pictures. It helped them keep making the event better. They planned carefully. Everything from the attractive flier announcing the \$2.00 fee, to trash removal and clean-up, was codified and monitored. (The proceeds funded two senior luncheons, which came at 11:00 AM on the first Saturdays of May and December. They used one activity, beautifully, to get ready for others.)**

**Municipal electricians came in weeks ahead of the pancake feast so dedicated wall plugs could safely provide current to three large coffee pots set in a row. A natural gas line had been stubbed out years earlier where two large portable grills were always installed for the event. Our staff had taped cardboard to the floor where the grills would stand.**



**Our kitchen, including the sink and refrigerator (set at 33 degrees), was scrubbed. The floors were waxed and buffed. We covered our tables, set as per “the book” with 6 foot aisles. We used vinyl table cloths purchased in advance, at a discount, along with most other supplies. Shiny new freshly bagged metal trash cans were deployed precisely at the ends of tables, and by the grills. Our lead volunteer arrived at the end of the shift on Friday night -- just when I thought we were all set. The windows in our event room were deemed not to be perfectly clean, and there was some concern about a tree in the parking lot in front of the building. I personally washed and squeegeed every window pane while waiting for tree trimmers. I was determined that their annual event would go smoothly, and it did.**

**400 people, including vacationers who return every year, ate pancakes the following day. It was a bright Saturday morning in late Spring. A young adult group that rented the building agreed to run trash and clean for free pancakes. They also made sure there was sufficient syrup, plastic utensils, and margarine in squeeze bottles on all the tables. A recreation leader sold tickets, while another stayed in the kitchen and ended up mixing all the pancake batter. Members of the recreation council cooked, and served the food. Ticket takers worked the line efficiently so that participants got their choice of bacon or sausage hot from the chafing dish along with their pancakes. Then eaters passed by a choice of coffee, juice from concentrate, tea, or cocoa. The great variety of hot drinks were possible because one of the large coffee pots simply held hot water. Tea bags and powdered drink mixes were distributed by another helpful volunteer who also offered napkins. The type of cups, plastic utensils, and paper plates were all spelled out in the plan book. A runner was available if more ingredients were needed, but the planning had been so good that no special trip became necessary. Approximately 70 pounds of Krusteaz Complete Buttermilk Pancake Mix -- just add tap water -- fed over 400 people two large pancakes each. Cooked leftovers were not saved.**

**There were enough extension cords, sufficient metal coffee cans to catch grill grease, large plastic trash bags, and new batteries in the public address system microphone. We had a clean mop at the ready.**

**With my kitchen and ticket staff supervisors in place I could circulate. My right hand recreation leader kept volunteers supplied, guided trash removal, and kept the restrooms perfect. Naturally, the clean-up was pristine, and I verified that all monies got in the safe. We watched over the group to help them achieve their goal, and enjoyed mutual respect.**

**As the group finished eating, cheerful announcements were made over the public address system. Activities included a very local talent show outside, and craft experiences for the children. Local merchants were invited to have tables. It was a true community event, which to this day leaves a good profit after the breakfast meat, pancake mix, and related costs of such specific items as “large 2-ply soak resistant 10 5/8 inch paper dinner plates” are totaled.**

**As mentioned, the two resulting RSVP senior luncheons usually host 150 people each time. Many participants are transported in city vans, to and from central locations, by recreation employees. Seniors are invited to sign in with their name and address at a guest book upon arrival, which puts them on the mailing list. Coffee, (many seniors prefer decaf) tea, and water are provided. They eat for half an hour, and then entertainment has included a choir in December, a dance troop, local clowns, and a band that played “oldies.” A few got up and danced. Diners receive little gifts, such as a flower pot in the Spring. Sandwich trays are catered, at a discount, by helpful local merchants. Wise presenters were ready to feed the RSVP amount of guests plus 10%. Seniors need to get out and have a fun day like this very much.**

**A more humble approach, that worked several times, was to simply invite PTA/PTO organizations from all the schools around my park to offer food at our big celebrations. You would see groups very carefully setting out favorite dishes on picnic tables, which created a kind of impromptu progressive dinner. Attendance got a boost through food purveyors’ “word of mouth” advertising -- always the best kind. Your event formats are shaped by local patron’s discretionary incomes.**

**As kids, we used to brown bag it at our playground all Summer. My flier announced “lunch with coach,” which brought our group together.**

**Your special day at the park is announced by a flier which includes the order of events, including one or more guided experiences where people interact, share, take turns, and come to know each other. Events focused on the tastes and strengths of attendees give people a chance to succeed, or simply relax, and feel good about themselves.**

**Your two to five hour presentation may be themed to a holiday, family fun, or some kind of competition. It will include snacks, lunch, or dinner, but need not be expensive to your department or public body.**

**The big warm weather family celebration is a picnic. Food sales or pot luck, everybody eats! There may be a stage with entertainment, or the suggestion that folks bring portable radios all tuned to the same station. At one gathering, the promise of a modest trophy evoked a car show. At another event, a member of an adult coin club that met at our building volunteered to be our magician. There was great interest in our “sporting goods swap meet,” where players found soccer shoes and metal bats too small for their previous owners, as well as other interesting items. One group enjoyed a bench press contest, which was a simple matter of bringing equipment out of the weight room for an afternoon. Inflatable jump toys are most exciting for children who do not usually enjoy them. Now climbing walls are being towed to parks. With the right proof of insurance they can be a novel diversion. My staple was catching family members playing simple low organization playground games, and awarding everyone involved a donated fountain drink coupon from a national chain store. The normally assigned employee got that duty, became an instant hero, learned all the names, and got a good first step toward motivating future events.**

**Themes for the big celebration included a battle of the bands between local high schools -- with G rated lyrics a must. I submitted a plan for a family fishing derby on our State’s free fishing day while posted at a City lake. One year I successfully invited the local scout troop to stage a “campout” during the afternoon picnic so they could recruit new scouts, and display their pastime. We also used the fact of baseball’s “closing day” to start our family picnic at the end of trophy and all-star presentations. Once it featured a muddy baseball board tug-o-war.**

Seniors like to be part of the action at your special event. They are valuable at craft tables, food preparation, record keeping, and contest judging. Adult clubs can do exhibitions and demonstrations. Find local musicians, military or school bands, and martial arts demonstrations.

Diverse holidays trigger local celebrations with hallowed traditions and wonderful ethnic food. Our celebrations centered around an adult sports tournament, special days of foreign lands/peoples, a “Parents” day on traditional Mother’s day, a couple of unique “new year’s” events, Spring egg hunts, the celebration of more than one country’s independence, and finally an End of Summer Round-up: It focused on a children’s art show, penny carnival, hot dogs, and house league softball “all star” games simply because we knew folks at that park would enjoy another large Saturday family event. You might sell otter pops for 25 cents each. Get just enough money to search for a cache of thrift store beads, or buy tissue for next year’s small kites. You might have a dance contest with the video camera, or post a tournament draw sheet for the “first annual” Connect 4 Championships. The round-up is an appreciation event for those who come to your area most every day. Why not plan and produce a simple party to reward their attendance?

Dedicate a RSVP flier inviting pre-teens to your Eggstreamly Eggciting Spring Egg Hunt Eggstravaganza. You can imagine how my flier, with attached permission slip, would look! It included depictions of happy rabbits, and decorated eggs. As they return fliers you learn how many zip lock bags of candy, with a little green plastic straw at the bottom, to assemble. Over the years we would have 200 to 320 bags ready as the basic prize for egg hunters. I would cut out four times as many pieces of egg shaped construction paper. This is a great way to use up scrap paper. You will place (“hide”) the construction paper cutout eggs around the park for egg hunters to find. Have an “eggsquisite” day:

At 10:00 AM ages 4 & under will hunt eggs in your tot lot, or sand box, which you inspect carefully for cleanliness as you place paper eggs. As hunters finish picking up the paper eggs, they line up at the office door to turn them in for their bag of candy. Three to five eggs per hunt carry a secret coded mark, which wins the “Mayor’s Egg,” a basket, or prize.

**At 10:20 AM the 5 & 6 year old hunt begins, perhaps in a picnic area, but near the office. Teenage regular attendees, trusted veteran egg hunt volunteers, begin recycling plain paper eggs out to areas where older children are yet to hunt. As before, the prize line produces winners of donated items. Be certain that aggressive hunters know it is not how many paper eggs you pick up, just if you are lucky enough to find the “magic” egg. Prizes included new donated “extra” youth baseball caps, and items saved in my “treasure chest” office cabinet from previous contests. That cherished Mayor had placed several eggs at every neighborhood hunt across town. It enhanced our event, and her public relations.**

**Then, at 10:40 AM, the 7, 8, & 9 year olds hunt over a large park lawn area. This group will run. Finally, at 11:00 AM, the 10 & Over hunt begins in a safe, yet challenging area. Be sure a staff member checks paper eggs, and tears up the coded prize eggs, so that they do not get “recycled” by well meaning volunteers. I cherish the memory of that hunt above all the others: I was just so lucky to have enough prizes!**

**Over the years we offered different craft projects to children waiting for their age group egg hunt. We painted hollow plastic eggs, decorated hard boiled eggs, or drew bunnies depending on that year’s budget and the number of participants. Painting small terracotta pots with tempera paint was a hit. A small parade of wheels can be created quickly with rolls of crepe paper, balloons, tape and string to decorate bikes, tricycles, scooters, skate boards, and the occasional roller blade wearer. Volunteers, and at least one staff member in the area, help youngsters decorate their vehicles. You may be able to borrow or rent a bunny suit so a themed character can lead your parade with appropriate themed music from a portable player after the final egg hunt. Make the parade a circular route with good photo op backdrops. Some parks use the bunny suit to charge for pictures with the bunny. You have to cover your costs, but I hope you also let family members take pictures of their little one hugging the bunny for free.**

**With luck there will be enough bags of candy to reward volunteers. You may have to stage impromptu hunts, as we did one rain challenged year.**

**The block party “street fair” type event on a large playing field is about as big as your park can realistically go. Major special events require many kinds of approval, so give yourself a full year to plan. Start by getting general approval from your department. Then study local safety department rules for special events. Pencil out a budget. Do not compete with other established events for dates, equipment, or special services. Many other parks may want to reserve portable stages or risers, folding tables and chairs, canopies, or large specialty items stored at your department’s central support area. Successful continuing events have a reasonable expectation to get what they need, so join the “club” politely. This will make other local presenters a good resource when (not if) you have a question. Begin attending activities similar to the one you envision, and collect the fliers from other events.**

**Act to reserve all necessary amenities as soon as you have identified your best possible date. Learn what you can get, including setup and take down assistance. Accept support staff time frames, and be gracious in your thanks for help from fellow employees. Information gained is added to staff/volunteer experience of what is possible. Keep everyone informed. Listen for alternative ideas, potential conflicts, safety issues, and rules changes. Your flexibility keeps everyone in the loop respected, and may present you with a different path to your goal. Keep everyone informed, through monthly “event committee meetings,” as your heartfelt effort yields ever increasing allies.**

**Fellow employees from other departments may welcome an opportunity to take a table or booth to present information on their field of expertise: Everything from recycling to gangs. It is fun to have a fire truck presentation included in the order of events. Your community group deserves input on presentations. Use their contacts.**

**Your vendor application forms become available eight months prior to the date of the event. Require a token payment to your recreation council for a space, or table reservation. Have potential applications screened by your event committee. No politics, or touching of patrons is allowed. You are G rated, and politically correct, in everything. Require recordings of all potential entertainment prior to approval.**

**Newspapers, radio, and television are the way to let the public know what you are doing. Get your department approved press release, or stop by the media outlet you wish to use. Find out what they need. Mature events are sometimes announced ahead of time in print, and then you may get a feature story including pictures from your big day.**

**Canvas nearby restaurants and fast food outlets to see if any would like to provide a “food court.” With that commitment, you are “halfway there.” Fast food chains may partner with you as a fundraiser event.**

**Get extra trash cans, and start the day with empty dumpsters. Devote a notebook to the event with all approved and disapproved permits, extra blank forms, agreements, vendor information, contact numbers, and related memos. Assign maintenance staff to work the celebration.**

**Develop the aerial view site map of the venue to scale, with “fire lane” access for ambulance, fire, and police vehicles. Note the location of the stage near the power source, safe entertainer “staging” areas, portable toilets/wash basins if required, the information canopy (with phone and first aid kit), food serving and eating areas (again, near the power they need), special parking areas, and spaces for large demonstrations. Assign spaces on the map when vendors and exhibitors are approved, and their check clears. Keep the event site filling up, but not crowded, so nothing is too far away for most patrons to enjoy. It is nice to be able to see the stage, and hear announcements, from the entire venue.**

**Recognize key volunteers with a special certificate award, and let them “get a hand” from the crowd. Start at 10:00 AM, and end no later than 4:00 PM. Plan for an aggressive clean up, ending by 5:00 PM. Begin thinking of how to make “Celebrate (your town)” even better next year. Use every possible suggestion, and your “buy in” will be phenomenal.**

**Make plans well in advance, even beginning right after the event, by inviting organizers and key volunteers to a recap, so you can begin planning for next year. This may involve snacks, coffee, tea, and a couple of hours of thoughtful input from all interested parties. Do this while everything is fresh in the group’s memory.**

**Your thoughtful delegation lets you circulate so people can get a break, or just to see that everything at your festival is going as it should. You are free to address situations as they arise. Be ready to break away to answer the phone, to take a reservation, or huddle briefly with your supervisor. Remember that you must always be so organized that you can step away from an activity when beckoned by management. Make sure the “boss” is offered the current snack. Invite them to be a part of what is happening for the moment they are there. How you treat them is how you treat everyone. Always do introductions, ebullient raconteur that you are.**

**When you learn how long it takes to set up and operate an activity you have “targeted” for your user group’s enjoyment, and know what they might enjoy, plan a simple children’s festival or family day. Your theme tops the flier invitation which includes an inviting picture. It is nothing more than a series of experiences you might present over a period of days, but compressed into a brief time frame. Pay attention to the little details, and if you have earned a smile at the end of the day, say “thanks for coming.”**

**An interesting customer survey will invite participants to share their reactions. On white card stock, express gratitude for valued input, then leave a 5” X 7 ½” open rectangle for comments or drawings. Below that invite patrons to “tell us about yourself.” Ask what they like, and how you could better serve their leisure time needs. Finish with “Anything else we should know?” Make contact information optional. Post some of their drawings. Gratefully incorporate what is learned.**

**Major Expositions, or Centennial Celebrations, work as trade shows with City Hall backing. Local lighting and drainage contractors are the perfect entrepreneurs to take charge, because they can make money by bringing the chosen venue up to modern standards for the major event. Seed money sometimes comes from a one time assessment of all local taxpayers, which is “sold” to the electorate by the issuance of free season passes to all contributors. The city gets a renewed central park, tourist revenue, jobs, new permanent exhibits, and a 6 month party!**



## **SAND LOT SPORTS**

**Simple “drop in” activities, pick-up games, and even intramural “house leagues” fit like interlocking puzzle pieces between rentals and paid activities at your recreation center. Resulting monitored, coordinated action enhances site safety for everyone.**

**Work from younger/slower to older/faster players when organization sand lot sports. As older kids saw me start beginner sports leagues, they would ask for their turn. Younger teams play on the public school short day -- often Wednesday -- after school. The older youth leagues play early on Friday evenings. Your big sports day is Saturday, with games dependably beginning around 10:00 AM. You are giving active youth something to look forward to, and getting them too physically tired to do much more than go home. Well run games yield satisfying drama, and are a good workout: Priceless community enhancement. Imagine leaving anyone out because they could not pay to play!?!**

**Keep intramural team sizes small so everyone is a crucial team member, and gets lots of playing time. Offer exceptional athletes the extra responsibility of helping teammates succeed. If one adult is organizing and refereeing four team intramural leagues it is easy to arrange teams for even play. This is important to hold everyone’s interest.**

**All participants ought to be able to make friends, be a respected player, and get lots of playing time around the seasons. Some groups of friends stay together for a longer time, and become interested in finding the “best” way to play as a team. The recreation leader may help them enjoy improving together, and must be there to help them find a joyous satisfaction in their maximum effort. Everyone believes, as you gently and steadfastly do, that “we win whenever we have done our best.”**

**There may be a few former players still attending your recreation area who know “how the games go.” They are the most valuable volunteers for sports program development you could possibly find. Watching and listening shows you what players and teams are trying to accomplish.**

**Styles of team play are based on height, speed, or strength advantages that members of a particular group possess. Highly skilled individuals must become the ultimate team player to prepare themselves for the next level of competition. The program becomes valuable to the extent that everyone “pulls together.”**

**But, with short staffing and no budget, how is that possible today? Like this: Make several office door signs, as in 1) The leader is in the gym, 2) The leader is on the field, or 3) The leader is on the multi-purpose court. Hang the sign, lock the office, and participate in patron guidance for periods of time in the afternoon, and again in the early evening.**

**With sports related promotional activities, pick-up games, and team practices, a simple approach is best. As groups grow, new players will learn the style of play from imitating more experienced participants, the way you probably learned to dance. Regular opportunities to play will invite individuals to follow their interests, and develop naturally. Learn the rules, and referee fairly. Each moment of play matters very much to striving young players, yet they forget the outcome long before parents and coaches ever do! KIDS JUST WANT TO PLAY A GAME.**

**Recreation sports need to be different from leagues organized by parent groups. We must keep our basic goal to put the children, who just want to play, uppermost in our planning and presentation. I have studied many formats for youth games as player, coach, referee, league, and tournament director for forty years. Parents protect their own. Ego driven coaches hammer fundamentals, and “an offense,” though few of them understand team offense. Larger, faster teams usually make their coach a “genius” in football, or basketball. Many players from high profile programs experience burnout by their teens. The recreation fundraiser types use equipment, uniforms, trophies, and grandiose culminating activities to “validate” their efforts.**

**Over the many years, players have told me their stories. A fellow lived on the edge of the park where he loved to play, but Dad wanted “travel ball.” Another quit because Mom critiqued every game, saying “I know she never played.” A former pro hated parents yelling at youth games.**

Let's look at a year on the sandlot starting with FLAG FOOTBALL. Begin on the Saturday after Labor Day. You need a couple of rubber intermediate sized footballs, and a few whistles. 14 soft 18" high PVC cones sit at the corners of your end zones, and along the sidelines to mark first downs on your field. 4 taller PVC cones at the "front corners" of the end zones look good if you have them. A couple of extra cones can define the back line of each end zone. Today we use Velcro attached flags. Get two full team sets of different colored flags. A mesh bag to hold your flags is a luxury, as are a few "middies" scrimmage vests. If you have filled in your gopher holes on a lawn with a safe running area of at least thirty by seventy yards, you are ready to host a sizable program. A 1 foot yellow cloth or felt square gathered around a small bean bag with a few rubber bands is your penalty flag. Keep this flag in your belt as much as possible. The group has "learned football" from the television. Call unnecessary roughness to eliminate violent play. Call holding to keep players from retaliating with extra shoving.

If your department promotes games between sites, they will publish rules. Use these rules for all your house league, or intramural games. Referee to keep players safe. Calling too many penalties ruins the game. If players get their touchdowns when they break into the clear, it is the same for both teams. Do not allow obvious cheating.

A luxury is sidelines, goal lines, and first down lines made with a field spray painter, or chalk machine. The field of play is ideally centered on a flat lawn 110 by 50 yards. Nobody has that, so you make do. Keep sidelines and end zone edges at least three yards from fences, trees, and sprinkler valve boxes. Make your two "10 yard" end zone rectangles at least 7 yards deep, and as close to 40 yards wide as possible. Divide the field of play between end zones into four equal rectangles -- your first down lines "20 yards" apart -- with the "twenty," at each end, and the "forty," a midfield line. Your seven cones set up along each sideline at the back of the end zones, and where goal lines and down lines intersect the sidelines. If you have less than 60 yards of field between your goal lines, you may decide to make only three equal sized first down zones. Make a short line three yards out from the center of each goal line to spot the ball for extra points. Extra point distances vary.

**The flier announces age group pick-up games on Saturday mornings, with the age 10 & Under game beginning at 10:00 AM. 12 & Under players begin at 11:00 AM. 14 & Under players begin at Noon. Play a fourth game at 1:00 PM, if necessary, so large older youth players, and prospective volunteers, can enjoy the action. Staff members have joined in as “player/coaches” to make teams even, and demonstrate individual fundamentals. You must have a signed parent/caregiver permission slip in your possession prior to the second time an individual participates.**

**Mature programs may have begun to stage these much anticipated pick-up games in the latter part of August. If you are just starting out, promote related activities while waiting for teams to form: “Two Man Football” is a pass and catch game with partners working as quarterback and pass receiver. Hike from the extra point spot, and go out for a pass in the end zone. Cross the goal line and button hook right, next time button hook left. Subsequently cross the goal line and cut left, then to the right the following time. On the third time through, receivers get to the goal line, then slant toward a cone at the back corner of the end zone, going right, the next time left. Finally, add the “come backer,” where the receiver goes to the back of the end zone, and then comes back to catch the ball just inside the front of the end zone.**

**Keep score of your passing contest by counting the number of passes each team completes. Give 3 points when passers lead their receiver so the ball is caught in stride -- 1 point if the catcher must wait for the ball. Adjust the challenges as necessary for larger, stronger players. Turn the game around and use the entire field. Require similar routes with longer passes, going from the extra point spot to out beyond the first down line for each change of direction pattern. Finally, go long up the middle, and include a “post pattern.” Award an extra 5 points for the longest completed “deep” pass. Your clipboard records all information.**

**By the time enough youngsters arrive for a pick-up game you have your captains. The best pass/catch combination picks second. Teams must pick within 10 seconds. The second best “Two Man” team picks first. If you can get four pass and catch partner combinations who are roughly the same size and speed, you are well on your way to league formation.**

**A first Saturday meeting may yield enough players by 9:50 AM, or 10:45 AM. You may find it necessary to start at 10:30 AM, for example, using a few older 12 & under players who arrived early for the second, 11:00 AM game. The main thing is NO CANCELLATIONS! Eliminate disappointment by playing the best game possible. You or a parent volunteer may have to fill in for there to be enough players. It is conceivable that your first game might run over time, and you have to begin the formal 12 & Under match up at 11:30. For a first meeting it is crucial to get every player a good run. Indeed, a couple of outstanding 10 year olds may be invited to fill out the teams in order to play the second game. Take a water break when the group looks tired.**

**The thoughtful recreation professional nurtures the growth of the pick-up games. Find out who is available, and when they can play Saturday, or week day, games through November. Then draft one or more four team leagues. Each team ought to have no more than three extra players over the number used in the game, depending on whether you are playing six, seven, or eight “man” teams. Six man is the simplest, and a great intramural game. Seven man found great popularity in the Midwest, and eight man lets each team put five players on the line of scrimmage, which includes more participants. Everyone is eligible to go out for a pass in eight man, and all deserve their number to be called.**

**You may form a 4 team intramural “house league,” free of charge, each time you get 30 participants roughly the same age, who are about the same size and speed. On that second or third Saturday meeting -- when the group stabilizes -- your “Two Man Football” contest partners may be surprised to become four sets of co-captains. THE FORTH PLACE PAIR PICKS FIRST, THEN THIRD, SECOND, AND FINALLY THE WINNING TWO “MAN” TEAM PICKS FORTH. React gently to their surprise, and assure them that if all the best players are on one team, the league will be no fun for anyone. You as coach, referee, and league director reserve the right to award players to teams in need, or make trades for the good of the league. Publish a schedule, and have copies for everyone. Talk it up, post standings, and allow NO FORFEITS. Let subs switch teams for a game if one group is short of players. Players appreciate flexibility to preserve the game.**

When games get more organized, play 20 minute running time halves. Later you will learn to stop the clock on a touchdown, and restart on the kickoff. In the early season formational scrimmages, let the “second choosers” receive the kick. Kick off 10 yards back from the midfield line, where the receiving team waits for the ball. You will notice players “back to receive the kick” without any instruction! Add things like the coin flip, and changing ends at the half, to make the “season” special.

When teams formed and first games were announced, a printed schedule became necessary. Young players like to see their names. Dates and times of games must be clear. Create a double round robin with single elimination play-offs. Post standings. Talk it up. You are the league’s head referee, and biggest fan!

### SAMPLE FLAG FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

<u>DRAGONS</u>	<u>CANYON</u>	<u>BAYOU</u>	<u>COUGARS</u>
Troy	Travis	Jon	Fred
Elmer	Richard	Caesar	Daniel
Tony	Jason	Ted	Raul
Nathan	Derrick	Don	Jaime
Anthony	Billy	Dan	Wil
John	Calvin	Tom	Mike
Michael	Alex	Josh	Bobby

(Staff reserves the right to adjust rosters/add players for even teams.)

Saturday Games:

<u>Oct 10 &amp; Oct 31</u>	<u>Oct 17 &amp; Nov 7</u>	<u>Oct 24 &amp; Nov 14</u>
11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM
DRAGONS vs. CANYON	DRAGONS vs. BAYOU	COUGARS vs. DRAGONS
12:45 PM	12:45 PM	12:45 PM
BAYOU vs. COUGARS	CANYON vs. COUGARS	BAYOU vs. CANYON

Playoffs Nov 21

11:30 AM 2<sup>nd</sup> Place vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> Place.  
12:45 PM 1<sup>st</sup> Place vs. 4<sup>th</sup> Place.

Turkey Bowl Nov 28

11:30 AM Nov 21 Winners Bowl  
12:45 PM The Turkey Bowl

# Saturday Flag Football League

TEAM	WIN	LOSS
DRAGONS	3	1
BAYOU	2	2
COUGARS	2	2
CANYON	1	3

**By the end of the first round, you are running the twenty minute halves with your wrist watch. Issue the “two minute warning.” Each team gets two time outs per half. You can run younger aged games on the hour. As interest -- tradition -- grows, your captains from the older group can help referee the younger games. You gently worked up to calling offside, illegal procedure if the offense is not “set” (motionless) for a second prior to the snap of the ball, pass interference, and holding while blocking or defending. You have firmly eliminated tripping, clipping, and un- sportsman like conduct from the first whistle.**

**Since you have no pads or helmets, punts on 4<sup>th</sup> down are announced free kicks. A kicker can take the hike “off the tee,” walk back, and kick. There is no rush, and you require half of the receiving team to stay up near the line of scrimmage until the ball is kicked. Local rules will vary.**

**Traveling to games with other playgrounds is necessary if you only have enough players for one team. Thoughtful middle managers could arrange games between teams of similar ability. Some teams may have great talent, or an empire builder on staff, to warrant regional play-offs with one or two play-off weekends. All but one of these very good teams get to experience losing so a “City Champion” may be crowned. It can occasionally be a positive point of pride for a neighborhood team.**

**The rest of the teams not invited to the championship tournament can have just as much fun by scheduling a return match with their most evenly matched opponent. Present the “Turkey Bowl” on the Saturday after Thanksgiving just so parents can see their children play one more time. All over town, the winners of these games can crow “we’re #1!” like college teams do when they claim the mythical championship. Remember, we are all about a successful experience for as many patrons as possible. Then, before you put the cones away for the season, have one last pick-up game with anyone present who wants to play a little longer. You may get a parent or two in the game. Some younger player might finally get their first touchdown. Catch a hard-bitten competitor having fun! One year our “traveling team” was hapless, so I split the team in two, and played a totally “home game.” The flier announced “Turkey Bowl: We’re Gonna Win One!”**



**Play-offs are fun in “non collision” sports. The Turkey Bowl eliminates potential injuries, and lopsided “boat race” play-off games, in flag football. A chunky, or “late blooming” player, may be getting ready to have a growth spurt. That individual may use a high school weight room to proudly work their way in to any number of high school athletic programs. Someone who peaks at an early age, and falls into a pattern of playing pick-up games for pure enjoyment, may replace you upon your retirement. The player who is proudly having “their best year” is experiencing success, which may be eluding them in school. As you revere their effort, you may engender a belief in self that they can carry back in to the classroom. Make certain that “fundamentals” are demonstrated -- not “stressed” -- by a competent individual.**

**There are pitfalls, because games involving rough players need close attention to prevent bullying, and violent acting out. Slowly stepping back, as play groups “get it,” is one of the great joys of public recreation supervision. You may have to limit someone’s participation, and, very occasionally, explain to a parent/caregiver why you asked someone to leave a game. Safety is the only valid reason. It is extremely rare when a young player does not eventually understand that your recreation sports must be enjoyable for all concerned.**

**In 40 years I gave two players “one last chance” to keep playing. One of those players made the adjustment, and I notified the high school coach that he had a big hitter coming. The other player stopped playing because the parent found more appropriate challenges for him.**

**We play for fun at the park, and virtually everyone finally figures it out. It is wonderful to check by your park on a day like Veteran’s Day, or New Year’s Day, when you are closed. When you see your mature play group enjoying an unsupervised touch football game, you know you have achieved a great accomplishment for your community as well as those individuals!**

**It happens gradually and naturally. You may have gotten the first game going by playing quarterback for both teams. Remind aggressive players to protect everyone’s safety “to keep the game going.”**

**You invariably have to break away from the pick-up game to take a phone call or sell a permit. Put captains of both teams in charge to agree on referee calls -- take control of the game -- until you return. Get back ASAP, especially at first. (Perhaps you are using a friendly older player as “full time quarterback.” Still, you consistently supervise the event. Any thoughtful employee can do this!) You may finally step back a little further and just watch. You notice courage, prowess, and skill development along with leadership skills -- staying calm to resolve their own disputes. Youngsters get to prove themselves as they learn to be aware of group safety. From the first meeting on landscaped surfaces, you have pointed out sprinkler control boxes, benches, trees, and fences. You are just watching over the use of your park as per the original intention of its development.**

**Regarding age group competition, cheating, and winning: Thirty years in to my association with youth flag football, I finally found a community doing it right for the players. Coaches were urged to get all the youngsters playing. There was a lot of interest, as well as some malnutrition, a transient population, and more than a few players who had repeated a grade in school. Groups developed a uniquely strong loyalty component as they grew up playing together, and wanted to represent their area proudly as a team.**

**We used official permission sheets and roster forms to honestly record the ages of all the players. Therefore, some teams became ineligible for “official” regional play-offs. Since the third team on the field for every game -- recreation professionals in our logo T-shirts -- knew the ages, some teams were designated “club teams.” Games between club and play-off teams during the regular season could thus be enjoyed without verbal sniping, or anyone crying foul to win by forfeit.**

**We had many fine games. All the players got to feel good about themselves, and play with their friends. Smaller, less physically able players got to be part of the group. Play-off teams quietly moved on, while club teams enjoyed their “bowl game.” The drama of competition was carefully preserved so strong personalities could garner a sense of satisfaction. Many sandlot players had their “one great year.”**

If you have little experience, it is daunting to be thrust into the role of coach, but your delegation and recruiting skills will see you through. Until help comes, here are some plays that have been successful in the past. Enjoy the game!

### **FRONT SCREEN PASS**

Send receivers on deep pass patterns to the sidelines. A blocking back slips off their block, and buttonhooks in the middle. Look deep, throw short, and a shifty runner may make a big gain.

### **BOOTLEG**

After you run a couple of “student body right” sweep plays, wait till later in the game, and have your quarterback take the snap and turn left. He fakes the handoff to your best ball carrier running to the right behind him. Everybody runs right as though it is another right sweep. The quarterback keeps the ball hidden for a couple of steps as he turns up the left side. Run directly at the lone defender who can stop you, and cut outside off your right foot about three strides from him. You might go all the way. Practice the fake handoff until no one can tell who ended up with the ball. Youthful defenders sometimes stop when they lose sight of the ball. Use the same fake handoff on kick returns.

### **PASS TO THE LEFT GUARD**

In eight on eight you have a guard on each side of the hiker. They mostly block. On this play, send the receivers deep to the right side, and have the halfbacks block. The left guard shows block, touches a knee to the ground, then gets up and slants out for a medium length pass on the left side. The quarterback looks right, then turns back and throws left.

### **DEFENSE ROTATOR PASS**

If you get to a game against an opponent you have not met, save your fastest pass receiver for the first offensive play of the second half. Have them slant in slightly from left end, and catch a pass seven yards from the line. All other receivers go deeper to the left side of the field. When he catches the pass, he loops across the field, even back to the line a little at first, and curves up the right side line. This unexpected route causes defenders to pursue at the wrong angle. Foot speed does the rest.

### **THE FLEA**

After a pass reception, the player with the ball running across the middle toward the right sideline can pitch back to a teammate running full speed toward the left sideline. A quarterback can roll out right, and pitch back to a wide out coming full speed to the left behind him. Study how experienced coaches isolate an end on a button hook, and send their halfback up the sideline behind the pass receiver for a pitch back.

### **THE BUCK--ON READY (an 8 man run up the middle)**

Hike the ball to your quickest halfback in “shotgun” on the first sound. The team gets “set,” as he walks up to take the snap. The center blocks the first man to his right. If a defender is even up on the center, or a little to the left, the center must leave that player and block the first D-line player to his right. Your best blocker lines up at right halfback. When the ball is snapped, he runs forward, and blocks the first man on his center’s left, to the left. The hole opens between those players, and the halfback with the ball runs straight up the middle between his blocking teammates. Your other agile blocker lines up in a slot back right, between the right guard and the right end. He takes two steps forward, and cuts across the middle to block the middle linebacker to the left, as the ball carrier runs by behind him, straight up the middle. Guards block to the outside, and ends run fast routes up the sidelines.

### **SIX ON SIX DEFENSE**

Have two wide rushers go to the halfback on either side, and then to the ball. One player stays on the line in the middle, and mirrors the ball -- it goes left, you go left -- it goes right, you go right. This player tries to stop the run at the line, or make a ball carrier cut back up the middle. Your other three players play back deep. The left and right side backs take the best receiver on their side, and go after the ball if it crosses the line of scrimmage. “See ball and man.” The deep safety in the middle keeps the ball in front of him, and takes receivers crossing the middle.

### **SEVEN ON SEVEN DEFENSE**

Use the six on six defense, and the extra player would be assigned to guard the other team’s best ball carrier man to man. Watch, learn, and adjust. If opponents use double passes or crossing patterns, play zone.

### **EIGHT ON EIGHT DEFENSE**

Similar to six on six, but add a middle rusher. This can be a small, nimble player since you have to quickly dodge in and just pull a flag. Add a second free safety so two deep backs can split the field as a left and right deep zone. The middle linebacker must be strong, and plays about three yards off the line. Like the middle up player in six on six defense, he tries to stop the run at the line of scrimmage. Now he must also play the short pass over the middle by “reading” the quarterback.

When the opposing coach has the ball and calls time, go to a zone, and have your wide rushers stay with the halfbacks instead of cutting to the ball. Then, after a play or two, go back to your basic defense. You will learn from what other coaches do. Focus your attention on what the other team is doing. Calm and poised, just keep telling your team to “do it like we practiced.” Be proud of your team, and pleased with their efforts. Tip your hat to an opponent’s good effort. Bring a small cooler with some otter pops for after the ballgame.

Our simple **PLAYGROUND JOGGING PROGRAM** consisted of an interesting half mile running course with no steep down hill runs where youngsters could slip and fall. When you ran a “lap,” I would put a star by your name. Another poster was a regional map. Runners could trace their progress by watching their star go across state landmarks, motivating continued participation. It was fun for them that I “took a lap,” which of course I had to do anyway to patrol my site.

**THE CROSS COUNTRY MEET** came on the second Saturday of December, a week after the Winter senior luncheon. Runners competed only against their own birth year, with boys and girls competing separately. This format yields many first place certificates! Ages 10 and younger go once around the course: A half mile race. Set up cones as necessary, and walk the course with the runners to eliminate confusion. Use a piece of brightly colored yarn for the finish line. Chalk makes the starting line. Make a clapper out of two pieces of finished 1X4 lumber about, a foot long, attached with a hinge to slap loudly together and simulate the starting gun. Use the commands: Runners take your mark. Get set. Then clap the boards together hard.

Use two quick claps of the boards to stop the race if a runner leaves the starting line early. It is a nice luxury to have three stopwatches at the finish line to time the first three finishers of each race. Runners in different divisions compete together to have three to five in each race.

Ages 11 and 12 will go twice around the course, to run a mile. On races involving more than one lap, you may include the feature of calling out the “splits,” or time elapsed, the first time runners go by the start/finish line. Ages 13 and older will go around three times. You can “clap” your boards again as runners begin the final, or “gun,” lap.

Be sure to have enough computer generated certificates for all first through fifth place finishers. Mature volunteers at the finish line pick an assigned finisher, first through fifth, and stay with their runner until you record race results. Have a stack of participant certificates so every finisher gets a commemoration of the day. End the day with a fun half mile “run/walk” so everyone present who wants to experience the course gets a chance. Make sure young participants are chaperoned so they do not work too hard. Did you have eight to ten folding chairs set up in the shade for mature spectators? This is a nice activity for your patrons who did not play much flag football, yet deserve attention.

When everything is put away from the cross country meet, and runners have gone home with the folks, it is immediately BASKETBALL SEASON. Play “H-O-R-S-E” with anyone available. It is a shooting game for two or three players, where you must copy the made shot of your opponent. If they miss, it is your turn to make a different kind of shot. Start by shooting free throws to see who goes first, second, and last. When a player fails to copy a made shot, they get a letter. First one to get the E in HORSE loses, and then you just start over.

As interest begins to grow, show beginners how to spread their fingers out on the ball, and catch with their palms, not extended fingertips. A basketball is big and heavy to new players, so keep them safe by having their hands ready to receive a pass, or palms up above shoulders if they move to get a rebound. Find a competent individual to show the lay-up, and free throw technique. Only be critical in matters of sportsmanship.

**Ages 10 & Under shoot free throws from 12 feet, or 3 feet in front of the regular free throw line. The next challenge is to see how many free throws everyone can make out of twenty tries. Start out by shooting till you make one, so we all begin “one for one.”**

**Tip in is the next harder game for three participants. Again you match free throws to see who shoots first. The other two players stand near the “blocks” in the “low post” on either side of the key. They leap to “tip in” missed free throws. If successful, they become the free throw shooter. One point for a free throw, and two points for a tip. Make 21 exactly to win. If you go over 21 points, your total drops to 13 points.**

**Like driving or learning to swim, your players need to be up to speed on how to use ball and body in the game. Slowly show pivot, dribble, pivot, shoot, and get the rebound -- keep shooting until the ball goes in or touches the ground. The moving pivot foot ought to be the same side foot as the shooting hand, so that right handed shooters “spin” on their left toe. When players get the basic motions so they can function in a game without traveling or double dribbling, **PLAY GAMES.** Encourage “half speed” half court games for beginners. Avoid drills, because, to quote members of the basketball hall of fame, “you don’t coach basketball, you play basketball,” and “play for fun.” This is a game of unselfish sharing you love for the good it does your patrons.**

**Many youngsters can enjoy playing basketball if you create situations where players of similar size and speed compete on teams with a total roster of six or seven teammates: The low organization type of intramural setting. To see how many individuals you can get playing at your site, organize the 24 smallest, slowest, youngest participants into four teams of six players each. Publish your double round robin schedule. No money beyond the purchase of the ball is necessary. It would be thoughtful to use the high school/college women’s size ball for small stature players. Each team is assigned a color, such as blue, green, white, and red. Players just wear one of their own shirts as close to their team’s color as possible to play in the game. You referee. If a team is short handed they pick up a player from the other team’s bench, and you supply “middies.” Everybody plays, which is why they came.**

**Moving through older age groups, you repeat the process, and create several “house” leagues playing on the short school day afternoon, early Friday evening, and Saturday mornings. Reserve the right to adjust rosters for competitive balance. You may let small, slow, older players run in younger games if they do not dominate, or play rough. An older female may be allowed to develop her game in a younger male league.**

**I have been talked into adding older players to the point that our final age group league required proof of enrolment in high school. On Friday evenings, your older free play attendees will often seek other forms of recreation, and few adult leagues ever play on Friday. This is the perfect time to use the gym space for teenage youth league play. What greater good than sending your 13 & Under, 15 & Under, and “Enrolled in High School” league players home tired, happy, and in need of a glass of milk to begin their weekend! Games with purely 20 minute running time halves can start at 45 minute intervals. Once again: True community service to the players and their neighborhood. Older players can be designated as team captains, and totally operate their own ball clubs. A few of your Friday evening players may be potential referees to help you with younger athlete’s games.**

**This activity creates great “buy-in,” so people in their formative years can feel it is their Recreation Center, too. Vandalism fades. Using the scoreboard gives Friday night the feel of being “important” games. Some of my Friday volunteer scorekeepers eventually earned money “running the clock” for the adult leagues.**

**I would see players shooting around in the course of my functionary duties. There were moments to offer individuals diverting challenges: Take a walk dribbling with your eyes closed, pointing your ear at the ball. Change hands often. They would be astonished at their ability to dribble a ball without looking at it! This produced a teachable moment: “The only time you don’t look at the ball is when you have it!” When they could do eyes closed dribbling, I suggested they dribble at high speed -- with eyes open -- around the gym, and make a lay-up at every basket. Urge them to use the other hand going to the next basket. Offer brief, fun pointers in passing. Do not stop games to pontificate.**



**As the season progresses with Saturday games, some players will almost always lack playing time whatever format you are using. Thoughtful coaches will stage a few extra games after the scheduled league games on at least a couple of play dates. These are for the smaller, slower, or younger players who could have more fun if the larger, faster players were not in the game. When I started this practice my great surprise was how the gym packed up with players from the earlier games who became cheering fans for their friends. An unintended consequence was that these were “future stars” games for the following season.**

**A spelling bee, the music recital, or a sandlot game have in common that children are proudly using their skills, natural gifts, or both, to succeed. While you would never think of disallowing a correctly spelled word, or distracting a musician, it is tragic to see how many sandlot referees disrespect and hinder adept players. Well meaning officials forget that the successful young player is winning their “spelling bee.” They are having “their moment,” and it may be the only time that individual gets to “go home beaming.” Recitals display talents that must be respected, as youth sports efforts must be! The acknowledged best young dancer who goes home with a ribbon is no different than the player who has the big game. Both are fragile. Sports can invigorate and motivate striving in life. Blowing the call on a clean steal, or using your whistle to slow down a ball club, is a disservice to the integrity of the game, and disrespectful to players giving their best. Blow your whistle to see the best game possible. You never allow rough play, or poor sportsmanship.**

**Restructure the intramural format if your hierarchy offers Saturday games between areas. Your flexibility allows many players to enjoy weekday “house leagues,” and weekend ball games with new opponents.**

**Play recreation basketball pick-up games, leagues, and “final four” playoff “classics” from the beginning of the Winter Holiday until Valentine’s Day. End your playoffs in February. This avoids conflicting children between your wonderful, healthy, important recreation program, and youth baseball/softball. IT IS FOOLISH TO OPERATE RECREATION BASKETBALL OBLIVIOUS TO OTHER YOUTH SPORTS BEING OFFERED BY LOCAL RESIDENTS.**

**Children get hurt when coaches tell them that if they miss a baseball practice to play a basketball game, they will ride the bench on the opening day of baseball. Many public recreation basketball leagues start late because operators of recreation gyms are “too busy at the holidays to think about basketball until after New Year’s.” How small, selfish, and unthinking these lazy dilatants are!! Staying out of each other’s way as we present fun youth activities models well adjusted, thoughtful adult behavior! Certainly we never set out to create conflict, but people have to make enough tough choices in life without public recreation overlapping youth basketball into the good efforts of bat and ball leagues funded and organized by parent volunteers. You are offering healthy alternatives to sitting in front of the TV, or getting into mischief, not competing with the other wonderful opportunities for children in your area!**

**If you coach traveling teams, or host teams from other areas, you may encounter “ringers,” or be the victim of “home town” referees. Ignore it, and proceed with style. Youth “stars” are often the youngsters who matured a little sooner than their peers. Stay calm, and teach defense with “no fouls.” Borrow the nearby High School coach’s video on basketball offense. Ask questions, and find out if they have game tickets for your players, a wonder field trip. Inquire if any of their “red shirt” athletes can earn community service hours assisting in your program.**

**Be a fast break coach that gets the whole team playing time. Learn “boxing out,” since getting the rebound after the other team shoots is the best defense. Have one out of bounds play. As in flag football, change your defense -- possibly to a switching man to man -- when the opposing coach calls time out. Then go to a “box and 1,” where four players guard opponents closest to the basket, while your most mobile player guards “paint” in the middle of the key. The quick player in the middle picks up drivers, steals passes, and goes for lay-ups at the other end. The time to run in a basketball game is when we lose the ball: Get back to stop lay-ups.**

**My teams enjoyed woodcraft on Mondays after the big game. Win or lose, none of the players ever brought up a previous contest, nor did I.**

**My favorite special event during basketball season involved a series of 70 second musical selections played from a portable “boom box” at court side. Leave 10 seconds of silence between selections, so the music may be stopped, and re-started for the next contestant. A shooter waits at half court for the music to begin. They dribble to shooting spots worth points as long as the music lasts, and score points by making shots: 5 points from beyond the arc, 3 points for a legal free throw, 2 points for “jumpers” in the key, or 1 point for a lay-up. The leader keeps a running total for each participant as they “play basketball” for 70 seconds. You may elect to penalize a point for traveling or double dribble. Record parts of different kinds of songs, and music from all local radio stations. It is very funny to see the reaction when a tough ball player has to shoot to opera, and the next participant gets country music or a children’s song. This activity teaches a coach their player’s capabilities, which could suggest an adjustment in offensive strategy.**

**Thunder is a good warm-up for practice. The team forms a line at the top of the key, with the first two players holding basketballs. The first player shoots a free throw, and can get the rebound if they miss, with two more chances to score. The second player steps up immediately to shoot from the free throw line. If a person makes their basket prior to the previous player, that first player gets “knocked out,” and stands behind the end line. You also must step out if you miss all three of your chances to score. Players must be good sports, and get the ball to the next free thrower, or tap the ball to the player hustling to make their shots. As in the musical game above, you must dribble and pivot correctly as you get your rebound and come in to shoot again. This game causes players to keep their balance with knees bent because they may have to pause their shot until an opponent’s miss caroms past. You do not have to stop playing to help an opponent who shot before you get their ball. The games moves quickly, and may go three “rounds.”**

**Besides the lay-up line, a good warm up for the game is standing the team in free throw mode, as each player shoots free throws. “Shoot till you make it, shoot till you miss,” then everyone rotates to the right to put a new player on the line. If you lack experience, start your five best runners -- make the game a track meet for the first three minutes.**

**“Traveling” to games can present culture clash in the modern urban environment. We traveled with a chaperone/fan to accompany each of our players. We efficiently arrived, did our best, and politely left.**

**I took charge of a recreation center, where, at age 42, I was the best basketball player in the park...an epic tragedy! Readers with a basketball background will share my reaction to the very wonderful recreation referee who blew a traveling call on a player standing stock still! At least that player had the ball!! My love of the game prevailed.**

**I made a bulletin board out of “common” (each worth a penny) basketball cards. The display was a series of four horizontal rows like a freeze frame motion picture. In the first card you saw a player getting a rebound. The next card had a player holding the ball up while looking to pass. In this manner each of the fundamental postures used by players to advance the ball together, dribble correctly, shoot, box out, rebound, put it back up, get back, and set up on defense, was shown in turn. We noticed palms up with arms raised in anticipation of a rebound, hands up on defense, and hands ready to receive a pass.**

**Simplified game strategy, including a “helping out man to man” defense, lead to a style of play where many players used up great amounts of energy, and enjoyed themselves hugely. The pictorial bulletin board was a great help to new players and coaches alike, who were seen to consult it often. I would smile to honor their interest, and take the opportunity to say such things as “never dribble when a pass will do.” Keep it fun, because it is all just practice until High School try-outs anyway! Research indicates that the motion of the ball holds our interest. It is amazing that indoor exercise causes such excitement!**

**Plan your end of season “banquet.” Pizza or pot luck is fine. The local high school coach would be a great speaker. Show game videos, or a “sports bloopers” video while they eat. Bring each participant up to receive their simple award certificate, or token trophy. The handshake, smile, and brief characterization of each player’s contribution honors their effort. This personal “thank you” from the “coach,” calling each player by name, means far more than any expensive award.**

When I drove to Alaska I found a combination ice hockey/basketball multipurpose court with a concrete “floor,” and boards. Though I never skated, I know my ice hockey program would be great. Running “the league” between rentals and traditional usage expectations would mean leaning heavily on local expertise. Certainly I could learn to present a usable ice surface, and cull volunteers from older player’s pick-up games. Finding volunteers, taking a real interest, and doing all I could, just makes it work.

SOCCKER is a viable Springtime alternative to parent driven bat and ball games. While making way for traditional pastimes, you keep the rest of the patrons occupied. Learning to play soccer offers a wonderful opportunity to display the humble ability to smile at your own efforts. Modeling enjoyment of the moment, even your own foibles, exemplifies your well adjusted maturity. You are gently satisfied with your own, and everyone else’s best efforts. Adding the “world game” may be your program’s most desirable element if there is a strong tradition of soccer in your surrounding neighborhood.

You may see multi-generational family soccer games at picnics. These parents will cheerfully help you organize your “sand lot” leagues. Listen to people with a soccer tradition on size of ball, field, and teams. Trust them to referee if they love the game, and you are just learning. A high school soccer referee’s class was an inexpensive way for me to get a rule book, learn “how the game goes,” and come to understand strategy by asking questions of grizzled referees who grew up loving their sport.

If you are doing playground soccer purely in a recreational setting, you may require sneakers -- no “cleats” -- and allow no slide tackling. This makes shin guards unnecessary. Eight on eight is a good game. The rule book will show field set-up. Protect the goal keeper. Decide if you are using the offside rule. It is not used for “indoor” play. “Offside” means you must have two opponents nearer to their goal line than yourself “when the ball is kicked.” Confused? You are not the first! Offside has been variously modified so you can be “even with” one of the last two opponents when the ball is kicked. Learning by doing is necessary, since there are exceptions to the rule in serious soccer.

**As before, you may be using your department's rules. Begin by setting up 3 on 3 games with two cones about 4 feet wide for goals. Players must mark, or guard, an opponent, and not play goalie. You teach "one touch" passing. Even teams make it fun. An experienced helper can show your players how to one touch pass and move to receive the return "wall pass," or dribble a few tricky touches to set up their own shot.**

**If you are thrust into coaching a team on short notice, try putting your basketball point guard, or football free safety, at goalkeeper. The linebacker type athlete plays "sweeper" in front of their goalie. Up field from the sweeper put three fullbacks for eight player teams, or four fullbacks across the field if it is eleven on eleven. The fullbacks pick up attacking opponents "man to man," staying between opponents and the goal. Fullbacks concentrate on the ball, and try to block it between their feet. If an attacker breaks through this wall, or "cantenacio," they are met by your linebacker, the sweeper. Your defense knows where your midfielders are getting open for passes to counterattack.**

**Offensively, keep spread out and moving into the open. Point where you want the ball, or where you need teammates to go. "Say it with a look." One touch passing can set up attacks as the group becomes better at communicating with nods and glances to each other. Put your best soccer player at center halfback trying to set up a speedy center forward, or taking some long shots on goal if the ball come back. Put the left footed runner at left wing. See the triangle, and look for set-ups. Teams may practice working the ball across, up, and back to the middle. You may find a couple of long kickers who can move the ball up field on the attack with two or three diagonal kicks. On throw ins, try kicking it back to the thrower as they run on to the attack. Rehearse corner kicks, and awarded kicks, so your team can play with an understanding of the game. Forwards will need to trade back into the fullback line to catch their breath. This gives everyone a chance to try for a goal. A "dribble trick" for first year players involves using both sides of the "kicking foot." Push the ball three times forward with the instep, then sweep the ball out to your strong side leg with a touch off the outside of the kicking foot, as the defender steps toward the ball. Run on, and shoot hard, if your change of direction has created space.**

**SKATEBOARDERS AND ROLLER HOCKEY** players roll outside on the pavement in the Spring. If you have a gym with portable volleyball nets you may get attendance at teen volleyball, and have to take another ref's class to figure out what to tell your patrons, because you can only present what you know. Such things as hula hoop, dodge ball, or even four square can be fun. Take a turn to monitor the situation as you share the experience. "Spring football" was a big winner at parks on Fridays when the bat and ball games sometimes took a break.

You may offer **"SUPER TOTS" SPORTS** for 90 minutes once a week. They enjoy bucket ball, a three inning T-ball variant with 5 gallon buckets for first, second, and third base. Use a softball sized whiffle ball, and a big hollow plastic bat. Everyone gets to bat, and then the other team is "up." You swing at the ball until you hit it fair. Base runners stop when fielders put the ball in any one of the three buckets. The batter is out if their fly is caught. If the batted ball gets through the fielders, base runners keep going, so a home run is possible. Place bases about 35 feet apart. If you can find gentle helpers to coach bases and keep defenders on task there can be lots of excitement and fun in bucket ball. If there are just a few older patrons looking for something to do, play catch or 3 flies up.

**"IN HOUSE" TRACK** works for age 7 through about age 14, and can even be presented day to day by one leader with a calendar of age group events. You may have a simple track meet on one of your Spring Break days when school is out, and the bat and ball folks have taken the week off to travel. If you are the only leader, the meet may have to run for two days. Have first, second, and third place winners in each year of birth. Clipboards with pencils attached by a piece of string record participants, times, or distances. Stay at the finish line of races as judge of the meet. Run races at various distances from the 50 yard dash to your half mile track on the first day. Present field events on the second day. With no long jump pit, you can stage the standing long jump with only a yardstick and chalk. The softball throw is a great event for participants who may some day try shot put in High School. You may make a "Wall of Fame" track bulletin board if you are taking photos.

**CHEERLEADING** is a sport as serious as any other in the modern era. We were lucky in my municipality that High School seniors had to perform 150 hours of community service as a graduation requirement. In the Spring, graduating cheerleaders have the time to share their sport at the recreation center with younger children. This became a much anticipated program which seemed equally enjoyable for the kids and “teachers” alike. Since the cheerleaders were volunteers, this was yet another totally free of charge program. They used a portable stereo, and shared routines two afternoons a week.

In **TEAM BALL**, a dodge ball variant, opposing teams face off across the center line of a multipurpose court, or a row of T-shirts laid across the lawn. They try to hit opponents below the waist with a rubber volleyball. You are not out if you can catch the opponent’s throw. Instead, you then may try to get them out. Behind both teams, back line players bracket the opposition from their “temp line.” The temp, a fast player, starts out on the back line for their team to get the ball, and throw it at the opponents. Thus, a temp and their teammates can get the other team running back and forth, dodging between two sets of throwers on the attack. A fun tactic is throwing the ball to a teammate instead of at the opposition to get them out with a quick catch and throw before they can retreat. As players are gotten out, they cross behind their opponents area to their team’s temp line. The original “temp” player comes out to join the runners in their team’s area who are still “in,” when one of their teammates gets out. Both teams run fast to get a ball that goes beyond the field of play, carry it back, and resume the action. The winning team still has players who have not gotten out as they manage to get the last opponent out with a throw that hits that player, but is not caught.

Frisbee golf works on a lazy afternoon. Safety department members may offer a bike rodeo. Double Dutch is fun with a two long jump ropes. In a wall ball variant, two players take turns kicking a ball into a backstop. It rebounds off the screen or posts until someone misses a kick, or the backstop. Then the next player in line goes in to start kicking. A Tornado brand foosball table costs over \$1000.00, but keeps everyone occupied for a generation if you have a safe indoor location.





The secret to success in 3-PITCH SOFTBALL is finding a pitcher who can consistently toss every pitch belt high over the inside corner as it passes the batter. As batters approach home plate they look left to right, and back across the field, to choose the place they want their hit to go. Batter's foot placement helps place hitting: Stay back in the batter's box, but close to the edge of home plate to stride into a pitch, and hit it off you front foot to pull the ball. Move up in the batter's box, but farther from home to step toward the plate and hit the ball to the opposite field after it passes your belt buckle. Batting practice in 3-pitch means learning to move your feet in the batter's box so you can place your hits between fielders. Less muscular players enjoy using this method to get "a single."

3-pitch is a batting game, so defensively keep it simple, and just try to get somebody out. If the opponents get a run, nobody hurt because you are all such good place hitters! Never get more competitive than your brief pre-season admonition, which you never repeat: "An extra throw is an extra base, and two extra throws is a run."

At a posting with ball field lighting we had success by starting a Friday night softball league. The Friday league filled up with very young adults for whom softball was a "passion." This was their "date night." A similar adult basketball "men's league" was memorable as a "C" league "for players who had never been on an organized team." It was a time when many older youth league players became paying customers.

Young bat and ball players want more games after their hardball season ends. Play "10 INCH" OVERHAND FAST PITCH SOFTBALL on a field with little league dimensions. The ball is the smallest diameter softball made. This format is for any playground with a leader who is able to stand behind the pitcher and call balls and strikes: Take sign-ups for players entering the 4<sup>th</sup> grade to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Draft a four team league. Reserve the normal right to move players so even teams are formed. Each team must have a couple of competent pitchers, a good short stop, catcher, and first base "person" able to catch the ball. All girls and boys who enjoy the practice games prior to league formation are invited to participate. The only cost was a box of balls.

**The four team “10 inch” league can start games on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 1:00 PM. Youth programs donated batting helmets and catcher’s gear, including shin guards. We used throw down bases, and played 9 innings. Players biked from the “dugout” for water breaks.**

**These games are for people who came to play a game, so the single league administrator can make decisions to avoid, at all costs, forfeits. The only crucial point is to play the best game possible with the players available every time a league game is scheduled. The double round robin gives two games per week for six weeks. There was unseasonable rain on the last day of July that year. Home plate was a “lake” so we set up our bases on the center of a “crowned” soccer field. With no backstop, we had to use a baseball element from the 1870’s, the “catcher’s helper.” The helper stands back behind the regular catcher to stop all the balls that would have been stopped by a backstop. We got the game in while sharing a little baseball lore.**

**The key is demanding that older, stronger pitchers work on their “change-up” against smaller, younger batters. Quietly state “It is a ball unless the batter can get around on it.” Many of the players have had enough serious hardball games since early Spring. There is no need for coaching. You are just bringing neighborhood playmates together for an enjoyable game. This league’s “all star game” is a wonderful element for your special day near the end of Summer.**

**That particular posting was near my home. I promoted in the Autumn, and there at Halloween came my ballplayers trick or treating! “Coach! Are you going to have the league again next Summer!?!” they asked excitedly. I told them I had been transferred to a new area. They were innocently hopeful: “Well, couldn’t you come back and do the league?” Intramurals were always flexible and could be totally inclusive. We used to form the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade traveling teams for the following year as softball season began. It was a simple way to keep friends together, and it left room for house leagues, enjoyed by all.**

**My heartfelt wish is that all our recreation professionals have “the league” for their regular patron’s favorite games around the seasons.**

**Bat and ball programs can begin with as few as one patron through the promotion of “STRIKE OUT.” Paint a strike zone on a cinder block wall bordering any multipurpose play area at least 12 feet out from the “left field” basketball sideline. Make the box 22 inches wide, with a 3 inch thick horizontal line across the bottom starting 14 inches up from the ground. Leave a 15 inch tall unpainted center area, and a 10 inch thick line across the top. Inch wide painted lines go down both sides.**

**You need a bat, at least one other participant besides yourself to begin with, and an old tennis ball. The pitcher toes a line or an agreed upon mark about 48 feet from the batter. A strike is a swing and a miss, of course, or a pitch that hit’s the part of the strike zone on the wall appropriate to the current batter’s height. The wall acts as a passive “catcher,” because unhit pitches rebound back to the pitcher. We used lines across the “field,” usually of an asphalt basketball court. Batted balls flying over a middle line were a single if they landed inbounds on the painted courts. Agree on foul lines. Hitting the fence at the far end of the courts with a fair batted ball on one bounce was a “double.” Hitting the fence was a “triple,” and over the fence fair was a home run.**

**Play “You can’t get it past me!” Promote 3 inning games with one or two player “teams.” Four player games add a fielder, and take turns batting. The pitcher and fielder catch flies, and grounders, to put batters out. In 1 vs. 1, fair grounders are outs. Missed grounders in 2 vs. 2 puts a runner on 1<sup>st</sup>. Imaginary “runners” must be forced, so a double with a “runner” on 1<sup>st</sup> yields “runners” on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

**Bald tennis balls will curve better, and you can throw a rising fastball. One site featured single elimination tournament play in different age groups. A participant, we found out years later, doctored a favorite ball with an electric razor. Since our strike zone was painted on a wall near the office window, I could play the radio broadcast of our local baseball team’s games to add some atmosphere to the contests. This activity was free and is still remembered fondly.**

**Go out with chalk, a bat, tennis ball, and your patrons. Work together to place your strike zone. Swing hard -- you might hit something!**

## **STAKE HOLDERS AND VOTERS**

**All park patrons are entitled to the actual service that has traditionally been provided by PUBLIC RECREATION. Any site supervisor who's "acceptable work product" is merely seeing that the work gets done -- by others -- risks producing empty parks and sedentary employees. The movement away from free activities exactly paralleled the shrinkage of recreation department's budgets -- and relevance.**

**Find public recreation employees who make a difference with the park users they are placed to serve. Look for those engaged in dedicated, fearless public outreach. Identify leaders presenting ongoing programs which enhance the interaction, socialization, and acculturation of all park patrons regardless of their ability to pay. Thank elected officials in writing for the critical service provided by individuals honestly caring for each member of their park's social group.**

**Highlighting recreation staff members who are meeting civic needs to your Aldermen is crucial. You are helping elected officials see that real service is possible within existing staffing and budgetary levels. Be the champion of public recreation programs at planning sessions. When local politicians agree to require useful service, they earn your vote.**

**Start your own network of citizen stake holders who know the value of programming to youngsters, seniors, and busy heads of households. Join your nearest volunteer public recreation board. Find good programmers in your recreation department as you get to know members of other recreation councils across your community. Work with your neighbors to stay in contact with decision makers.**

**Stake holders will please be **TOTALLY POSITIVE, ELEGANTLY BRIEF, AND RELENTLESS** in their contact with elected officials and park staff. There is great strength in numbers. 2000 voters can sway most local elections. Identify compatriots, and vote as a block. The best way to officially raise an issue is one idea at a time expressed in as few words as possible.**

**Tirades get ignored. Put your single concern -- in writing -- in the form of a simple question. Address your inquiry to responsible individuals. By keeping the topic a single issue, no bureaucrat can feign ignorance, and put off compliance by asking what was really meant by the contact. Questions in writing must be answered with reasonable efficiency. One thoughtful stakeholder began evoking relevant service by writing an inquiry about when flags should be put up and taken down.**

**Save official responses so they may be referenced as necessary. This inexorable, yet totally reasonable, methodology commands attention, and will have value commensurate with your reasonably achievable goals for park service. Accept official answers that make sense: Raising “dead horse” issues serves no one. Badgering, or nagging is counterproductive! An attorney or two on your recreation council vastly increases the power of your public body. Just remember to have recreation staff keep physical control of the public money check book.**

**Voters, the few remaining recreation employees, and thoughtful park patrons, must characterize public parks and recreation centers in the category of traffic lights, sturdy guard rails, lifeguards, libraries, or the civic theatre. There is that word again: Civic. Useful recreation leaders shed light on proper park usage. They stand guard between what is down the alley, and innocent youth. Their watchfulness provides crowd control, quells patron disputes, furnishes first aid, and is more than “entertainment.” The inexpensive service conserves a space to grow up safely, grow as a person, and enjoy maturity: A place to celebrate life, re-create one’s spirit, or just experience natural beauty.**

**Useful staffing of parks must be protected by voters. Every program participant becomes a voter in several ways: They choose to return to a site which presents safe, satisfying experiences. They may volunteer to enrich the detail and size of some activities by taking on responsibilities. If their sandlot sports, or arts ’n crafts experiences, were presented by leaders exhibiting wholehearted commitment, those participants will likely vote in favor of park bonds. Such satisfied citizenry remember the fun they had at public parks for a lifetime. They elect officials who promise careful oversight to keep recreation areas flourishing.** -

**Park staff must interact with patrons on a regular basis. Interested citizens -- together with elected officials -- motivate parks department heads to require proactive programming from staff at our public parks and community centers. Hard bitten Bean Counter Alert: Free programs produce volunteers, a data base on all participants, a built in neighborhood watch, and virtually end vandalism. Consistent activities nurture a wholesome atmosphere where folks in the community end up entertaining each other. This results in a safer environment which generates less calls for service. You get safer streets, more well adjusted taxpayers, and priceless quality of life neighborhood enhancement.**

**Our national culture has some glimmers of hope. Park police in at least two of our major cities respond to the need for public service by reaching out to their park's visitors. They provide help beyond their basic enforcement function. At least one police youth club has provided incredible outreach and support to big city residents ages 8 to 17.**

**Officers serving at the operation volunteered. The police command wisely used officers who wanted to be there. This shows an understanding that staff in a recreation setting must honestly be interested in their work for their presence to make a difference. That department found staff eager to provide a wholesome atmosphere where youth could flourish. Commanders there promote athletic events for officers to compete with older local teens. Another jurisdiction thoughtfully worked with a local college, and their public recreation department, to divert youngsters into an after school art program.**

**The patrons from my playgrounds and recreation centers loved the park as much as I did. I recently saw two friends from my free Sunday morning floor hockey league that I presented single-handedly "back in the day." They were with their young daughters at the Halloween pumpkin patch. These daddies were now interested in their daughter's usage of the local recreation center. I urged them to become involved with the recreation council, as a "hockey Mom" had done to promote their Sunday league so long ago. This grassroots "civics in action" will produce new friendships for all concerned, and enhance their way of life. I fervently hope they require outstanding public service.**

**The energy, flair, and intention of an experienced, energetic recreation center administrator must come from the heart. Their desire to include everyone who arrives at the park is a calling which is only observable, a character issue met on an individual basis. The chain of command in park service can promote based on programming track records, but more than likely will attempt to control public expectations, offer a chance to volunteer, and remain passive. That strategy has worked.**

**Chipping away at the practice of recreation staff using their free time on the clock to relax requires patience and diligence. You may or may not have seen them laboriously applying make-up, working on their racing form, or “double dipping” by operating an adult league contractually at another municipal location while they accept salary to sit importantly at their desk! These last folks will develop leagues, and photocopy schedules for profit, but say they have “no time” to promote youth leagues where they work! We knew that calls outside the public phone network were tracked, which lead to cronies networking socially with fellow employees -- untraced on the “work phone.”**

**Some of these folks stated flatly that they were “too busy with the holidays” after flag football to promote a cross country meet, or think about youth basketball until after New Year’s. They needed to go shopping at lunch! This last created the time squeeze between hardball and our basketball leagues. Self important types knew that any conflicts were not their fault! In retrospect, they were the ones who never smiled much. When you look at public parks through the eyes of a patron, as I did until age 55, the loss to active youth was astonishing.**

**When public recreation centers got E-mail, it became easier to order the repair of a water leak, or arrange for the pick up of restroom tissue. Did anyone anywhere think to use the E-mail like an old fashioned phone tree? E-mail database contact lists could easily include patrons, as well as media outlets, for the dissemination of the recreation area’s news letter, new program promotion, or invitations to special days. County Fairs and pro sports ticket offices are canvassing electronically. Why not the recreation centers? Be part of the oversight body to see that the use of new technology has a public service emphasis.**



**Technology can streamline outreach to all patrons. The ramifications of such goals could freeze the chain of command until “usefulness to patrons” is the ultimate basis for possible decisions within budgetary constraints. “Extra work” in active patron outreach is the entrenched bureaucrat’s fear. In recreation you cannot define what is enough, and those working with the public are never done, unless they can eliminate expectations. The public must be the department’s conscience. New machinery will be something to hide behind just as cubicle walls have been, or it can become the “E-megaphone,” and “E-bean counter,” enabling leaders to present unprecedented programming. Computer literate folks could facilitate program by volunteering to help with system integration and software use at their recreation park office.**

**I first encountered a cash register at the entry point of a recreation center on Vancouver Island in the 1970’s. For a Canadian dollar you could use an Olympic pool, a pristine hockey rink, their “health club quality” fitness area, a shiny clean gymnasium, or pass the time in the restaurant watching others play through clean plate glass windows.**

**Now cash registers are appearing at some garden variety recreation areas -- as though there was something to sell regularly to all patrons, which there could be! If the cash registers are used to quantify the intake of quarters for a craft project, or to watch a video (with punch and popcorn), then they have value to the type of clientele recreation centers were placed to serve.**

**Besides being an attractive nuisance to potential bad actors, cash registers ultimate represent additional arcane paperwork, ultimately insulating the last available employee from the public. Will gadgets, and “important” paperwork, sequester staff until the office functionally resembles a Grimm’s Fairytale ivory tower -- including a trapped spinner of needless forms?**

**Much is rightly done for patrons with special needs. Active youth needs the same level of service! The kid who sells “hot” auto parts at a fast food restaurant, or groups walking at night in dark clothing, need inviting activity options for their well being. It only takes the WILL.**

**Form public policy by working as a voting block. Get a consensus among your stakeholders about the importance of active recreation leadership at your parks -- using only the staff in place -- with the existing amenities as they are now. You are asking for no more money!**

**Develop a mailer, “4 up,” on a sheet of card stock printed on both sides: On one side is the mailing address for your alderman, council member, or mayor responsible for park policy. Every interested voter sends the same card to City Hall requesting proactive recreation outreach for all.**

**On the other side of the post card ask that they please mandate, facilitate, and verify service for all park patrons in order to achieve re-election! Work together to word your requirements:**

**Dear (Alderman or Mayor),**

**In this time of serious social and financial challenge, please work with your Human Resources Department and Recreation/Parks Department: Motivate your existing recreation staff to keep all public park patrons -- youth and seniors -- engaged in activities regardless of their ability to pay. Our park staff needs their primary job description defined as active oversight to keep all park users safely occupied with existing staffing levels. Your involved and continuing leadership is necessary to keep staff efforts focused on service to every patron as their first daily duty. Please answer this request in writing to tell me how you can achieve robust community service for all interested potential patrons using only the resources and employees at hand. (Include blank lines for your group members to write in their name and address, and amplify their concerned outreach.)**

**Requests to public officials must be simple and polite. Persistence and determination are necessary. You must achieve a plurality of like minded voters who are all willing to communicate with elected officials in writing to make a difference. Please remember Henry Thoreau’s “three most important things in life: To be kind. To be kind. To be kind.”**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Public Recreation staffing was conceived of so people could “find themselves” in the park through experiencing a series of wholesome endeavors. Various operations necessitate organized paperwork. Functionary duties must never hinder the job as originally conceived: Inventing, designing, planning, producing, and presenting those useful experiences for people who enter your area of responsibility.**

**You must be interested to be interesting. Charming folks with a beguiling watercolor table, or inspiring your team with a new zone trap scheme, is hardly trivial if it brings the neighborhood together peaceably. Good folks will always be glad you are there providing a stage for friendships to occur in a wholesome context, and you are there anyway... People will not care what you know until they know you care.**

**Public recreation programming is not publicly funded “entertainment,” it is SOCIALIZATION: Individuals are being guided into proper site usage. Simple, free activities lead to, and protect, fee programs. The area is safe and civilized because everyone is welcomed and included.**

**I worked in the river of life running through public parks, in motion at the center of the group! I met youngsters, and later played with their grandchildren. I helped them as best I could while they focused my service by sharing their stories. Decades passed. Thousands came, took part, then went on their way. I see many faces as I remember so many good times. Think of the old coach -- I’ll be thinking of you.**

**My last flier is for a gym and lit ball field. A full time supervisor takes Tuesdays and Sundays off. Part time staff covers brief shifts on Monday and Friday, all day Tuesday, as well as working to assist during Saturday events. Diligent supervisors may “time shift” to work an hour on Sunday administering an adult softball league -- delivering balls and updated schedules -- on behalf of their volunteer board. Profits fund free activities for all those who arrive “just looking for a place to be.”**

Municipal Recreation Department

# Community Center

*This line traditionally carries the address and phone number of the site.*

# Activities

**We are here to help you use your park:**

**Mondays 10:00 AM to 9:00 PM: Senior Exercise Club 10:30 -- Noon.**

**Special Events/Crafts 3:30 -- 4:30 PM.**

**Teen Sports 6:30 -- 8:00 PM.**

**Tuesdays 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM: Youth Sports 3:15 -- 4:45 PM.**

**(Fee Program) Adult Sports Leagues 6:00 -- 9:00 PM.**

**Wednesdays 1:00 Pm to 9:00 PM: Youth Intramurals 3:15 -- 5:15 PM.**

**(Fee Program) Adult Sports Leagues 6:00 -- 9:00 PM.**

**Thursdays 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM: Senior Exercise Club 10:30 -- Noon.**

**Volunteer Recreation Council meets first Thursday/Month**

**4:00 -- 5:30 PM. Please bring your ideas and energy!**

**(Fee Program) Adult Sports Leagues 6:00 -- 9:00 PM.**

**Fridays 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM: Bridge, Yatzee, Mahjong 1:15 -- 3:30 PM.**

**18 & Under Intramural Sports Leagues 5:30 -- 8:30 PM.**

**Saturdays 10:00AM to 4:00 PM: Age group athletics and Special Days**

**Saturday Youth Sports -- 10 & Under 10:30 -- 11:30**

**AM.**

**12 & Under 11:30 -- 1:00 PM. 14 & Under 1:00 -- 2:30 PM.**

**18 & Under 2:30 -- 3:45 PM. "All Stars" on Special Days**

**Closed Sunday: Contractual (Fee Program) Softball Tournaments TBA**

***DAILY FREE PLAY HOURS CHANGE SEASONALLY, AND ARE POSTED IN THE GYM.***

**PARTICIPANTS AGED 18 AND UNDER MUST DETATCH AND RETURN SIGNED**

### **OFFICIAL PERMISSION SLIP**

**I agree to allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in:**

**(check boxes)  Equipment check-out  Sports  Special Events/Crafts**

**I will hold the municipality and it's employees harmless from injury or death resulting from participation. Signed \_\_\_\_\_**

**PARENT OR GUARDIAN**

**DATE**

**Home Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_**

## **ADDENDUM~RECREATION SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS**

**Hypothesis: Does proactive outreach to all park patrons, including offers to participate in simple ongoing activities, have the effect of keeping the back seats of police cars empty, or less full, of juvenile offenders?**

**Experiment: Find municipal recreation sites about the same physical size -- operated by a single department -- in affluent, middle class, and lower economic level areas. Look to see if these locations can be differentiated by the way each staff provides day to day supervision. 1) Seek active sites, where supervisors are consistently providing simple activities to promote programs and develop volunteers. 2) Identify similar sized facilities supervised by passive "watchers" who largely wait in their business office for renters, and minimally patrol their area of responsibility. 3) As a control, identify a similar number of public parks or recreation areas in the same department where no staff is assigned. Respectfully ask the Police Crime Analysis Unit serving that same municipality for totals of Juvenile Offenders Apprehended within a mile of each of the above study locations. Ask if other local parks in the jurisdiction have high Juvenile arrest rates in the same mile radius. Is it possible to correlate high recreation program membership with lower juvenile arrest rates around any publicly funded community recreation operations? Conversely, are Juveniles arrested at a higher rate near passively supervised or unsupervised sites? If so, proactive recreation is relevant, and other experiments are indicated:**

**Can successful program presentation elements be identified, acceptably codified as per Civil Service norms, and replicated in other areas where well adjusted civic participation is found lacking, or arrest rates of juveniles are relatively higher? Are arrest rates found to be lower in areas where programming outreach is instituted for all youngsters regardless of their ability to pay? Can a repeatable paradigm for enhanced public recreation service be defined, even for areas where a park is staffed by one person? Working recreation professionals may indeed be proven able to regularly safeguard the public health of youth with simple free programs. A paradigm shift could result.**