



American Academy for Park & Recreation Administration

AAPRA 40th Anniversary: *Reflections on Forty Years*

Part 3 - The Legends of Parks and Recreation

As we celebrate the **40th Anniversary** of the American Academy of Parks and Recreation Association (AAPRA), we reflect on our history as an organization; remembering leaders and events that were key to our founding, development and growth. We'll celebrate AAPRA's forty years of success. We have looked at *the first ten years*; the *history of the Extern Program* (Tom Venniro), one of the major Academy programs developed in 1995, during the second decade of the organization; and in this third installment, we look at another the major program: The Legends of Parks and Recreation (Kotowski)

Overview

The Academy's Legends Program is the only visual history of individuals involved in parks, recreation, and conservation efforts in the United States. Through one-on-one interviews, professionals, educators, citizens, and policy makers share stories about their contributions to the profession. The interviews record the Legend's personal background, professional insights, advice and philosophical beliefs.

The Legends of Park and Recreation Program was initiated in 1981 by Robert (Bob) Toalson, one of the Academy's founding members. Toalson, who took a keen interest in history, felt that the Academy could make a valuable contribution to the profession by creating a file of oral histories of top administrators in the field to introduce young people entering the field to the philosophies and accomplishments of their predecessors.

At the same time, Dr. Jim Mertes was producing the "Living Legends in Parks and Recreation" series at Texas Tech University and was primarily focusing on Directors of the National Park Service. These dual efforts were eventually combined under the Legends Committee of the Academy. The Academy obtained copies of some interviews conducted at Texas Tech University to add to the Legends collection.

The first of the Legends series of videotaped interviews of leaders in parks and recreation took place at the National Recreation and Park Association Congress in Minneapolis in October of 1981. These interviews were with Dr. Edith Ball, Conrad Wirth, Frank Vaydik, Robert Crawford, and Clifton French.

As of the Academy's 40th anniversary year of 2020, there have been 138 Legends. In addition to the videos of individuals, the collection also includes several themed videos with more planned.

Over the years, the program has encountered challenges including lack of continuity and flow of knowledge; lack of funding available to arrange for professional technical production of the tapes; and "the tapes have not been adequately promoted and have languished in the Academy's files and, although they represent irreplaceable firsthand history, they have not been well used for their intended purpose." [John Potts, Legends Chair, in August 1995 Academy Bulletin]

An attempt was made as early as 1995 to secure a sponsor to ensure technical quality of the tapes, but it was not until 2011 when Landscape Structures, Inc. became the sponsor of the program and technical quality could be ensured. In 2016, the AIPE/Academy Foundation approved \$17,500 for development of eight of the themed videos.

Attempts to address maximizing video use have included brochures; articles and postings in various media; creating summaries of each video, shortening the length of video interviews, posting videos on the AAPRA website, and the development of themed videos.

The idea of themed videos was first mentioned in 1995 and other than videos on the formation of NRPA and an interview with former National Park Service leaders, this idea was not fully realized until 2015 when a research team of Dan Dustin from the University of Utah, along with Matt Brownlee and Kelly Bricker (U of Utah) and Keri Schwab from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, conducted a content analysis of selected videotapes. This resulted in the development [as of 2020] of eight themed videos with more planned.

The process for nominating and selecting Legends has evolved over time to a more formal process, from suggestions of names; to submitting a resume and letter identifying what contributions the candidate has made; to submitting: 1. Name of proposed Legend along with any credentials 2. Place of work and corresponding positions, listing most current first; 3. Summary of why this person is being nominated as a Legend: (one or more) a. Major project completed b. Instituted a concept, idea c. Applied research to the field of parks and recreation d. Significant contributions, and 4. Closing recommendation. An online nomination form was developed in 2020.

Beginning in 2015, those selected as Legends have received enhanced recognition, including being introduced at the AAPRA General Membership Meeting where they receive a small memento and being listed in the Academy Banquet program.

*The 40th Anniversary Task Force would like to thank Andee Chestnut for her contribution of time, memories and research skills, which have been invaluable in our search for documents and files, from which we have developed the histories of the Extern and Legends programs, and the past forty years of AAPRA.