

AAPRA 40th Anniversary: *Reflections on Forty Years*

Part 4 – Looking Back: 1991-2020

The initial idea for establishing a park and recreation academy grew out of the merger that created the National Recreation and Park Association in 1965. The American Academy for Parks and Recreation Administration (AAPRA) was created by resolution: "*to establish the **American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration** and to pledge \$100 each to assist with the cost of the organization*"; and signed by twenty-nine park and recreation professionals at the 1980 NRPA Congress in Phoenix, AZ. There was a commitment to provide opportunity for engagement and continued professional service. There has been no looking back since AAPRA inception, rather continued innovation, inspiration and celebration of achievements and milestones for the organization and the profession.

1991-2000

The nineties saw the AAPRA move forward under the leadership of Charles Pezoldt (1990-91), James Truncer (1991-92), Ron Dodd (1992-93), Ray Kisiah (1993-94), Dr. John Crompton (1994-95), Jim Colley (1995-96), Doug Sessoms (1996-97), Robert Hall (1997-98), Jane H. Adams (1998-99), and Vern Hartenburg (1999-2000), serving as Academy presidents. The nineties also, was a decade of many "*firsts*" for AAPRA, such as the first formal Academy newsletter, the **Academy Bulletin**, published in 1992. The **AIPE/Academy Foundation** was created in 1994, with the first Board of Directors meeting at the NRPA Congress in Minneapolis. One of the most impactful AAPRA programs was the establishment of the **AAPRA Externships** in 1995, with the first Externs (Mike Benard and Tracy Taylor). The **Academy website** was created by Dr. Peter Witt that same year. Other technological "firsts" included: the *Academy Bulletin* went online in 1999 and the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* converted to an electronic format in 2000.

The mid-nineties also saw AAPRA co-sponsor two important professional development events: ***Recreation for At-Risk Youth: Programs that Work Colloquium*** in Fort Worth, TX in 1995; and the "***Recreation-as-Prevention Forum***" in Washington, D.C. in 1997. However, some of the Academy's "firsts", really set the initial direction for growth and development of the park and recreation profession *e.g.*, establishment of the ***Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA)*** in 1993, with the first visitors training conducted at pilot sites. The first four CAPRA accredited agencies received recognition plaques at the 1994 Academy banquet in Minneapolis. Although **The Pugsley Award** was initiated in 1928; and administered by the National Park Foundation from the mid-sixties; the administration of the Cornelius Armory Pugsley Medals was transferred from the National Park Foundation to the Academy in 1996. AAPRA has presented these national awards ever since at its annual banquet.

A couple of "people first" for the Academy were **John Potts** being selected in 1996 "to become the AAPRA Executive Secretary/Treasurer, when Bob Tolson steps down"; which occurred on January 1, 1998; and **Andee Chestnut** became John Pott's assistant for the Academy and the Foundation in October 2000.

2001-2010

AAPRA was led into the 21st century and its first decade by Presidents Sandra Whitmore (2000-01), Terry Trueblood (2001-2003), Dr. Peter Witt (2003-2004), Michelle Park (2004-2005), Dale Larsen (2005-2006), Joseph Wynns (2006-2007), Chuck Witt (2007-2008), Steven Messerli (2008-2009), and Jim Garges (2009-2010).

The Academy formalized an agreement in 2004 to assume the responsibility and governance for conducting the **National Gold Medal Awards** in partnership with NRPA and co-sponsors Porter Athletic Equipment Company and MUSCO Lighting, LLC. Additionally in 2004, an **Ad Hoc Diversity Committee** was appointed; and two externships added, which began in 2005, designated for diversity candidates. The first **two diversity externs** were Oralethea Davenport, Lan Oak Park District, IL and Jonathan Jones, Beverly Hills, CA. The diversity externships were renamed the **Ernest T. Atwell Externships** in 2007.

The Academy received funds (2006) from the National Recreation Foundation to publish two books on the heritage of the park and recreation movement in America. In 2007, the first **Gold Medal Finalist reception** was held and MUSCO Lighting became the sole sponsor of the Gold Medal Awards. A new membership category, **Urban Directors**, was implemented in 2009. Additionally in 2009, **Davey Tree Expert Company** joins the **National Park Foundation** as sponsor of the Pugsley Awards. **Rick Grodsky** became the Executive Director (formerly Executive Secretary/Treasurer) in October, after John Potts retired. **John C. Potts (Pottsie) Leadership Development Scholarship** was established by AIPE/Academy Foundation; and the first awards made in 2010. The Academy website and listserv moved from Texas A&M to Sagamore Publishing in 2010.

2011-2020

Tony Cisneros (2010-11), Lori Daniel (2011-12), Tom Lovell (2012-13), John McGovern (2013-14), Bill Scalzo (2014-15), Becky Benná (2015-16), Chris Nunes (2016-17), Mark McHenry (2017-18), Carolyn McKnight (2018-2019), and Dianne Hoover (2019-2020) served as Presidents of the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration during 2011-2020.

Highlights for these years included **Landscape Structure, Inc.** becoming a sponsor of the **Legends Program**; and the initiation and implementation of the **Armed Forces category in the National Gold Medal Award Program** in 2011. The first Armed Forces Gold Medal Award was given in 2012. A **survey** sent to members on the **Academy's relevancy and future role with regards to furthering the parks and recreation profession** was distributed in 2013. The results would provide impetus for Academy future goals and initiatives.

The first **Extern Reunion Social** was held in Charlotte, NC in 2014. A **Mentoring Program** with AAPRA and NRPA's Young Professionals and Administrators' networks was implemented in 2015, with forty-seven Academy members serving as mentors. At the 2015 NRPA Annual Conference in Las Vegas, the first **"Lessons from the Legends" topical video** was presented. A **National Symposium: "Recreation, Parks and Public Health"** was held at Indiana University in 2016 and co-sponsored by AAPRA and the AIPE/Academy Foundation.

The management/operations responsibilities were assumed by **Jane H. Adams** as she became the AAPRA Executive Director on November 1, 2016. The next three years focused on continued quality improvement of Academy programs and services *e.g.*, *reserve fund policy (2019)*; developing marketing and promotional tools and strategies *e.g.*, *press photos prior to Gold Medal Reception (2017)* or *letters sent to Gold Medal Award finalists' governors and legislative representatives (2018)*; and enhancing outreach efforts to unrepresented or underrepresented states (2019).

As AAPRA began its 40th year and planning for celebration and reflection, the Academy, the country and the world faced an unprecedented event—the *coronavirus pandemic*. All of us faced some form of lockdown, reduction and/or downsizing in program delivery and services. The spring of 2020 brought **ZOOM**, virtual classrooms, working from home, “take-out and delivery” services for everything from food to purchasing a new vehicle. We all faced doing business differently over the next 12-17 months. Parks and Recreation programs went virtual; or provided pick-up activity options, drive-in style programs, and senior meal delivery. Services took on new formats, but the demand for parks, trails and green space reached new heights as citizens discovered the benefits of connecting with nature, of physical activity and enjoying the outdoors with others, which provided appropriate social distancing and a venue for social interaction.

AAPRA felt the impact of the pandemic as well. The **2020 NRPA Annual Conference** scheduled for Orlando was cancelled and replaced with a virtual conference; and thus, another “first” for the Academy was achieved with the **2020 Academy General Membership meeting and awards being presented virtually**. Although there were challenges during 2020, AAPRA took a positive step into the future contracting with **Red Barn Communications** to provide association management services.

As we conclude our series of looking back at the past forty years; reflecting on and celebrating the leadership and organizational accomplishments of the Academy, we can be assured that the Academy will continue with its mission of service and giving back to the park and recreation profession. So, here’s to the Academy’s 40th Anniversary and to another forty years of making a difference in the parks and recreation profession!

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michal Anne Lord". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michal Anne Lord, Co-Chair
AAPRA 40th Anniversary Task Force