Recreation Alberta

A publication of the Alberta Recreation & Parks Association

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A Celebration of 75 Years

This is a special edition of the Recreation Alberta magazine celebrating the past 75 years of ARPA. It has been designed and printed to replicate and honour the Recreation Alberta magazines that were a staple of ARPA's member communication through the 1970s, 80s and 90s.





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This QR Code will lead you to the full ARPA history that is now available on the ARPA website. There is more than 75 stories including recaps of each decade, stories on our trailblazers, archived history and much more.



From the Pen of the President

Katie Biberdorf

Looking Back. Looking Ahead.

Seventy-five years is a remarkable milestone—a time to celebrate, and perhaps most importantly, to look ahead.

Since 1951, the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association has been part of a remarkable story. Generations of leaders, volunteers, professionals and members have helped build an organization grounded in a simple but powerful belief. That recreation and parks contribute to healthy people, strong communities and vibrant environments.

While Alberta has changed considerably over the past 75 years, the value of recreation and parks has remained constant. They bring people together, create opportunities for connection and belonging, support physical and mental wellbeing, and provide places to play, explore and experience the natural world.

That is ARPA's legacy, and it is a legacy worth celebrating.

Our 75th anniversary has also given us an opportunity to better understand that legacy. Through the tremendous work of volunteers led by Candy Lannan, ARPA has collected stories, photographs, memories and milestones from across our history. This work has brought our past to life while recognizing the many people who have shaped ARPA and Alberta's recreation and parks sector.

We have also had the opportunity to reconnect with alumni from throughout ARPA's history. Their stories and experiences remind us that relationships are at the heart of our organization and provide valuable perspective as we consider the future.

And the future will require us to continue evolving.

ARPA is modernizing its governance model, including a smaller, more focused Board of Directors supported by committees, networks and other opportunities for members to contribute and engage. These changes are about ensuring ARPA remains sustainable, relevant and responsive for the next 75 years.

The opportunities ahead are significant. Recreation and parks are increasingly recognized for their contributions to preventative health, social connection, community resilience, economic vitality and environmental wellbeing. At the same time, our sector faces new challenges and changing expectations.

ARPA must be prepared to meet both.

As we celebrate this milestone, we honour those who came before us while recognizing that we have a responsibility to those who come next. Our history gives us perspective; our members and partners give us strength; and the opportunities ahead give us purpose.

Our 75th anniversary is not simply a celebration of where we have been. It is an invitation to consider where we can go together.

Here's to 75 years of legacy—and to putting that legacy into action for the next 75.

Happy 75th anniversary, ARPA!

Executive Director's Jottings

Steve Allan



As we step into 2026, we also step into a remarkable milestone, the 75th anniversary for ARPA. It's a moment that has me reflecting not only on ARPA's legacy, but on my own journey with the organization.

I began my career with ARPA as a practicum student from the University of Alberta's Physical Education and Recreation program (now Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation) in the fall of 1998. I had just returned from a year of study in Australia through an exchange program and had missed the usual interview and placement process. Enter David Mitsui, who suggested I connect with the Alberta Recreation & Parks Association as they were still looking for a student.

I'll admit it, I had never heard of ARPA (shame on me!). But I reached out to then Executive Director Paul Servos, and we scheduled what was less an interview and more a conversation. There was an immediate sense of fit, and I said yes to the opportunity.

I started in September 1998 and was quickly assigned to assist with conference planning. That year's conference, Recreation Round-Up!, is still a fond memory. Hosted at the Kananaskis Lodge, it felt like we had about 100 more people than the space could reasonably hold. I even slept on a cot in a shared room with Paul and Doug Munn, an early lesson in adaptability and teamwork.

Other early projects included helping design a professional certificate program for recreation and parks professionals in Alberta, as well as writing a report on the state of community recreation infrastructure and the importance of lifecycle planning. Remarkably, these topics remain just as relevant today as they were more than 25 years ago.

Shortly after the conference wrapped up, Paul, and the only other paid employee, resigned. Just two months into my first professional role, I found myself steering the ARPA ship from an administrative standpoint. What could have been overwhelming became an opportunity. The ARPA Board of Directors launched a comprehensive organizational review over the following year.

That work ultimately led to the hiring of Rick Curtis as Executive Director. Through Rick's leadership over the next decade, ARPA expanded and took on new and exciting opportunities that have led to ARPA's long-term success and sustainability. Rick continues to be a huge mentor for me to this day.

Somewhere along the way, I became a "lifer" at ARPA. I've had the privilege of being part of ARPA's 50th, 60th, and 70th anniversaries...and now, it's 75th. So much has changed over the decades, and yet so much has remained the same.

I'm often asked why I've stayed with one organization for so long. My answer is always simple: the people. The volunteers, staff, leaders, mentors,colleagues and friends I've worked alongside have kept me energized, inspired, and always reaching for what's next. Together, we've continually pushed ARPA, and the sector, forward.

As I reflect on more than 25 years with ARPA and look ahead to celebrating the 75th Anniversary milestone with members, partners, and alumni, I remain genuinely excited about the future of both ARPA and the recreation and parks sector in Alberta. I'm inspired by what we can achieve together and the countless lives enriched by the work we do every day.



The National Scene

Deb Comfort

The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) is our national partner association. ARPA is one of 13 members of CPRA, which operates under a confederation governance model. Your membership in ARPA also means that you are connected to the CPRA and its national network, programs and voice. This vibrant organization is advancing several national initiatives designed to strengthen the recreation and parks sector, build sector capacity and ensure recreation and parks have a strong voice in Canada's future.

Renewing the Framework for Recreation and Parks in Canada

The Framework for Recreation and Parks in Canada has been an important foundation for the sector since its release in 2015. CPRA is coming to the completion of a renewal process to ensure the Framework reflects today's realities and future needs.

More than 2,500 people from every province and territory contributed to Phase 1 of the renewal. The current phase has focused on turning the renewed Framework into a shared national agenda, supported by collective action, shared measurement and stronger collaboration across the country. Timelines for endorsement of the renewed policy elements are targeted for February 2027.

CAN Active Insights

Data is increasingly important to understanding community needs and making informed decisions about recreation and parks. CAN Active Insights is a national data platform that brings together information about communities, recreation infrastructure, facility use and gaps. It provides professionals with information that can help support planning, investment and advocacy. We would encourage everyone to check CAN Active Insights out to see how it can support and benefit the work in your community.







Summit 2.0 – Moving Forward Together

Building on the national conversations that shaped the National Recreation and Parks Framework renewal, CPRA's Summit 2.0 Forward Together Summit will bring recreation and parks leaders and partners together to explore how the sector can move from a shared vision to coordinated action.

The Summit will provide opportunities to connect, share ideas and examine issues such as infrastructure, workforce development, belonging, and crisis preparedness and response. It is also an opportunity to strengthen the sector's collective voice and build relationships across Canada.



Advocacy Capacity Building Initiative

The Advocacy Capacity Building Initiative (ACBI) is helping organizations across the recreation and parks sector build the skills and confidence to engage effectively in public policy. The program includes open-access learning opportunities as well as a more intensive Leadership Cohort focused on understanding government decision-making, developing advocacy strategies and communicating compelling, evidence-informed messages.

The initiative is designed to strengthen coordinated advocacy, while supporting organizations to advance their own priorities at the local, provincial and national levels.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the important role CPRA plays in connecting the Canadian recreation and parks community, strengthening our collective capacity and helping ensure the value of recreation and parks is understood by decision-makers and communities across the country.

member must consider
situation and decide how to proceed.

The Board has been frustrated and disappointed with some of the outcomes regarding the distribution of

As you are aware, we ved this issue since its ver four years ago and have ions at conference, have rectly with the Minister of Development and Senior staff, and have developed

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ARPA / CP/RA

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The ARPA Origin Story

By Candy Lannan

"At various times, it has been suggested that we convene a meeting for Executives engaged in public recreation in Alberta and thus provide an opportunity for them to meet and discuss matters of common interest and concern." Quote from the original letter sent to 12 executives of major urban recreation, health, physical education, culture and sports agencies by J. H. Ross, Director of Health and Recreation Branch in the Province of Alberta Jan. 18, 1950.

Feb. 20 press release by J. H. Ross indicated a meeting had been held and agreement reached to form the Alberta Recreation Executive Association.

Those in attendance were from Edmonton, Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat and included: Mr. J. H. Ross (chairman) Professor M.L. Van Vliet, Director of Physical Education, University of Alberta, Richard MacDonald, Coordinator of Cultural Activities, Department of Economic Affairs, A. S. Bird, Supervisor of Physical Education, Edmonton Public School Board, John Farina, Superintendent of Public Recreation, Edmonton, William Garnet, Director of Sports and Recreation, Calgary, Bill Hutton, Supervisor of Health and Recreation Branch, Bert Maltin, Director of Recreation, Medicine Hat, George B. McKillop, Supervisor of Physical Education, Lethbridge Public School Board, C. Jarvis Miller, Sec-Treas., Red Deer Recreation and Athletic Association, J. N. (Bud) Murdoch, Athletic Director, Lethbridge, Waard Stekel, Supervisor of Physical Education, Calgary Public School Board.

The constitution and bylaws were formed and Executives was dropped from the title. In 1951, The Alberta Recreation Association was formed.

In 1952, the first annual meeting of the ARA was held in Calgary; membership was $2 and there were 16 members. In 1954 there were 25 members; in 1955 32 members, In 1956 28 members; in 1957 42 members. A municipal member category was added to the individual membership in 1958. There were 63 individual members and 2 municipalities, In 1958 there were 62 members and 1 municipality. Grande Prairie was the first municipal member with Three Hills being the second. Three Hills is the longest continuous municipal member.

The ARPA History



1950

- "At various times, it has been suggested that we convene a meeting for Executives engaged in public recreation in Alberta and thus provide an opportunity for them to meet and discuss matters of common interest or concern." Original letter sent to 12 Executives of the major urban Recreation, Health, Physical Education, Culture, and Sports agencies, by J.H. Ross, Director of Health and Recreation Branch in the Province of Alberta, Jan. 18, 1950.

1951

- The constitution and bylaws were drafted and notedly so, the word Executives was omitted. Board members brought forth discussion on:
- Coordination of activities with other Provincial Associations
- School recreation problem
- Publication of information of the erection of new gymnasia or play fields
- General plan to assist communities establishing community recreation programs

1952

- Membership fees for the Association were $2.00 and as of March 29, 1952, there were 16 members paid to date.
- The first Annual Meeting and Conference of the A.R.A. was held in Calgary May 3, 1952. Committees appointed by the President and ratified by the Executive Committee are: Membership, Program, Publicity, Auditing, Nominating and Personnel.

1953

- The Association requested the Government of Alberta appoint a Director of Physical Education and Recreation for the Province.
- Two Board Members reported on a National Parks and Recreation conference they attended in Windsor. National issues included: National Aquatic Standards, need for more and better public relations in Recreation and the use of schools and school areas for Community Recreation.

1954

- A proposal for affiliation with the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association was endorsed.
- The Christmas Training Institute was scheduled for December 28, 1954, with Elsie McFarland suggesting to the A.R.A.' s Secretary, A. V. Pettigrew, that the training covers the type of program possible in public and private agencies. Also suggested was the Single Leader program in small or rural communities.

1955

- The Board and Executive declared the desire to form a society, under the Societies Act. The name of the Society is now the "ALBERTA RECREATION ASSOCIATION", an affiliate of the National Recreation and Parks Association.
- Red Deer Composite High School was selected as the location for the second annual Provincial Recreation Institute from December 28th -30th. Joint efforts from members of A.R.A. and the Community Recreation Branch ensured that the seminar was a success.

1956

- Members now are more in tune with the Recreation activities/programs of other communities, through the publication of a regular newsletter.
- Petitioned the Alberta Amateur Hockey Association to eliminate rough play in hockey.
- The Association also endorsed an emphasis on Skill Development for the younger participants in hockey programs.

1957

- A request was put forward that the Provincial Department of Education should: oversee school Track and Field competitions at individual schools, to arrange district championships and to sponsor Provincial Championships.
- Hockey issues again ... petitioned the Alberta Amateur Hockey association to eliminate body-checking in Midget and lower hockey classifications.
- In an effort to improve financial support for Recreation Programming and Facilities, A.R.A. requested that the Government of Alberta provide per-capita grants to Municipal Governments.

1958

- Recreation interests in all its phases in Alberta, as one of the main objectives.
- Professionals in the field had the opportunity to attend the Annual Meeting, May 10 and 11, at the Banff School of Fine Arts.
- Later that year, October 17-19, the same school was the scene for the Western Recreation Conference. Cooperation from the Cultural Activities Branch and the Department of Economic Affairs assisted the Association in presenting the theme: Expanding Horizons of Recreation.

1959

- A.R.A. instituted an award for "Outstanding Contribution to Recreation."
- In an effort to establish a Recreation Degree Program, an Education Committee was formed to approach the University of Alberta with the request.
- The need also arose, to request, the Community Recreation Branch to implement a program of Ski Instruction.
- With so much resource information in the stream, a committee was established to investigate the development of libraries in the province.

1962

- Went on record as favouring the heavy involvement of Lay People in the Organization.
- Asked the Government of Alberta to appoint a consultant in the field of area and facility planning, design, construction and maintenance.
- Requested that the Government of Alberta conduct a seminar dealing with the problems and implications of Leisure.
- Requested A.R.A. representation on the Provincial Recreation and Cultural Development Board.

1963

- Established a Provincial and Federal Parks Committee to maintain a watching brief on developments in the Parks Field.
- Spoke out strongly against the Government in favour of the retention of adequate school gymnasia for recreation amateur athletics, and adult education purposes.

1965

- Established a Professional Standards Committee to look into the formation of a professional wing for A.R.A.

1966

- Advocated a central A.R.A. office and Executive Secretary for the Association.
- Requested that the provincial Department of Public Works establish future sites for homes for the aged only after detailed consideration has been given to the needs and problems of the aged.

1967

- Initiated a workshop on Recreation Leadership Skills for those who work with the aged.

1968

- Promoted the establishment of a program of training for horticultural, parks maintenance, and facility personnel in Alberta.
- Changed name to the "Alberta Recreation and Parks Association" with its principal object being, the stimulation and advancement of Recreation and Parks services, pr-grams, and development in the province of Alberta.



1969

- Established affiliation with the Alberta Association for Continuing Education
- Endorsed the principle of trade status for Gardeners.
- Spoke out strongly in favour of the conservation of Outdoor Recreation Resources.
- Stated the need for schools to become "community centres in the true sense, in which the emphasis will be on education for life rather than on education for a living".
- Endorsed the newly developed Recreation Technicians course at S.A.I.T.

1970

- Studied the availability of adequate recreation grant funds to smaller municipalities.
- Advocated a more effective distribution of grant funds.
- Achieved significant changes in the province's new School Act.
- Presented a brief to the Minister of Youth requesting:
- Increased emphasis on recreation services
- Establishment of a provincial Dept. of Recreation and Parks.
- A greater abundance of Recreation Training courses on wilderness areas,
- A cessation of the selling of mineral rights in wilderness areas
- Community use designs for schools and involvement of local recreation authorities in the planning, design, and operation of community school facilities
- The establishment of urban provincial parks in Alberta
- Integration of the regulations of swimming areas under one department
- Controls on leasing of waterfront property to individuals,
- Financial assistance to enable needy individuals to participate in recreation programs, and
- A Provincial Government subsidy of 80% of the cost of an ARPA Executive Secretary

1971

- Established a central library for ARPA
- Produced a 20 year history of the Association
- Endorsed greater student involvement in the Association Advocated the establishment of daylight saving time as an adjunct to summer recreation programmes.
- Endorsed the formation of an Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association within ARPA
- Requested the establishment of an in-service Training Program for recreation personnel.

1972

- Petitioned the Government of Canada (via the Government of Alberta) to preserve the ecology of the Lake Louise area and to reject the "Village Lake Louise" development proposal.
- Petitioned the Government for the provision of increased recreational services for the physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped.
- Initiated the "Alberta Victor Pettigrew" award for the community in Alberta that has done the most in a particular year to enhance the quality of life to its citizens.



1973

- Endorsed the "Summer Employment for Recreation Students"' program.
- Initiated "ARPA - Minister's Tours" Joint tours to various Alberta municipalities by ARPA executive and the minister and senior staff of the Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation.
- Established a community school committee to do research, develop a library and foster the community school concept. Asked the Government to accelerate their study of coterminous boundaries for regional planning commissions, provincial recreation areas, tourist associations, etc.
- Asked the province to develop and implement a provincial mosquito-abatement program.
- Reiterated a request to the province for the establishment of urban provincial parks.
- Developed an affiliation with the Provincial Arts Committee.
- Advocated a revised, more equitable recreation grant schedule.
- Advocated "area" athletic games in preference to provincial games as a means of increasing participation of greater numbers of Alberta athletes.
- Advocated numerous improvements in the early Childhood Services Program including:
- Changes in leader qualifications.
- Concessions for disadvantaged children.
- Relative increases in fun-ing for non school operated programs.
- Greater public involvement in Early Childhood Services Planning, and
- Involvement of recreation professionals in planning and administering E.C.S. programs.

1974

- Requested that the Provincial Government revise and update their regulations re: swimming pools.
- Petitioned the Governments to ensure that the "1978 Commonwealth Games" include a complete cultural festival as well as the traditional athletic events.
- Endorsed the Provincial Government's "Project Cooperation" program.
- Advocated an integration of ARPA with CP/RA. Advocated an improvement of relationships between ARPA and staff of the Dept. of Culture, Youth and Recreation.
- Established a research committee to investigate planning proposals for the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies.
- Established a research committee to maintain a watching brief on the "New Further Education Policy"

1975

- This year marked the 25th year of the Association.
- Recreation Alberta became the official publication of the Association.
- Regional Recreation Associations were formally recognized and a closer working relationship developed.
- The Province was approached to enact legislation which would allow municipalities to levy off-site charges for the construction of recreation facilities.
- Endorsed the Provincial Government's Major Cultural Recreation Facility Development Program.



1976

- Investigated the feasibility of hiring an "Executive Director".
- Board of Directors were directed to approach the Public Utilities Board regarding ways and means of reducing utility rates for public recreation facilities.
- Advocated that the Provincial Government provide greater encouragement and incentive for development of fitness and lifetime sport activities.

1977

- Held a workshop on Energy Conversation and the potential for reducing utility rates for recreation facilities.
- Co-sponsored the 1977 Recreation Administrator's Seminar
- Established a committee to look at a media package outlining recreation and recreation leadership as it relates to the quality of life.
- Retained the services of a lawyer to prepare a report on the implications of the proposed new Planning Act.

1978

- Major revision to the Constitution and by-laws were initiated.
- Creation of a task force to develop a plan of action for the Association.
- Signed a joint membership agreement with CP/RA for 1979.
- Government announces a new financial assistance program for Provincial Associations.
- Participated in planning committees for the Recreation Administrators Seminar and Energize '78.

1979

- Substantial increases in funding became available from the Western Canada Lottery (Alberta Division) and the Provincial Government.
- A full time Executive Director was hired.
- The Recreation Administrator's Seminar became ARPA's responsibility.
- ARPA.'s new Constitution and By-laws were implemented in October.
- The Delivery of the Leisure Services Report was distributed to ARPA members and the Alberta Government.
- ARPA elects the first Lay/Civic member as President of the Association.

1980

- Endorsed the Federal Government's decision to boycott the Olympics in Russia re: Afghanistan.
- Leisure Services Report developed and used as a 5 year planning document.
- Board meetings were circulated around the province .
- Conference was entitled "The 80's, Recreation Decade of Choice."
- Provided comments to the government on the "Be Fit for the 80's, Grant Program".
- Co-sponsored the 75th Anniversary Coaching Congress. Gave financial support for the "Canadian Leisure Congress on Leisure Research".
- Consulting firm hired to gather data for long range plan. Initiated a study to investigate
  ARPA's financial indepen-dence.
- Took out membership in AARFP.

1981

- Developed Membership Roster.
- Held 2 parks workshops.
- Conference Theme was "Changing Perspectives -Understanding Roles".
- Issues session at conference implemented.
- Regional meetings held to have input into the long range plan. Reported on "Sports Development in Alberta".
- Budget went from $28,000 to $292,000.
- Civic Standing Committee worked with local Recreation Boards to solicit their support to lobby provincial government for increased operational grant.

1982

- Presented one year complimentary membership and pins to graduating recreation students.
- Lines of communication and exchange of information was established through meetings with Provincial Treasurer and Caucus Committee.
- The "Use of Consultant's Study" was completed and distributed to membership.

1983

- Met with Alberta Recreation and Parks Deputy Minister and updated Sport Delivery Policy.
- Met with Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and discussed Western Canada
  Lottery Grants.
- Contacted the Metis and Indian Groups and Associations in Alberta offering assistance and inviting them to join ARPA.
- Membership Development Committee met to discuss ARPA's involvement in Recreation Software programs and sent out needs questionnaire to membership.
- All listed voting representatives received a membership card, certificate and annual update sticker.
- Recreation Alberta increased to 6 issues a year.

1984

- Reserve fund established to carry the Association activities for 6 months.
- Wrote a letter to the Host Community for Alberta Games Council stating that singling out in performance of a boy's hockey age in view as opposed to basic games philosophy and ARPA takes exception and disagrees.
- Reviewed membership to determine representativeness of the Board and make special effort to encourage nominees from low represented areas.
- Individual Practitioner membership raised from $5 to $55.

1985

- AABRD funds transferred to RPW.
- 3 year Development Plan established.
- Recreation Information Committee formed.
- Student Director term changed to 2 years from I year.
- "Careers" Booklet started.
- 25% administration fee on educational events put in place.



1986

- Responded to Alberta Sport Council's position on a new concept for games in Alberta.
- Scholarship Committee initiated the "point system" for the selection process.
- Resource Development committee held 4 meetings to try and find a way to increase ARPA's financial position.
- Ready, Set, Grow date changed to May.
- Wrote a letter to all post-secondary institutions within the province of Alberta requesting their degree of interest in having an advisory committee.

1987

- "Bill 52" impacts were studied and a letter sent to membership asking them to review the Bill and make their comments known to councillors, Ml.A's and Municipal Affairs.
- Summary Report and Responses to the Advisory Committee on off-site levies and Development changes was received and reviewed.
- Recreation Alberta was encouraged to print leisure/ recreation research information
- Letter sent to educational institutions asking them to conduct workshops
- Supported Alberta Recreation and Parks work in leisure/ recreation research especially "A Look at Leisure" Bulletin.
- Identified operation of lottery booth as potential fundraising activity.

1988

- The Resolutions put forth at the 1988 conference included:
- Encouraging the government to increase funds made available to municipalities through STEP, announce the program early in the year, and establish a more accurate system in which municipalities can predict the number of employees they can hire under the program.
- Support AUMA task force on Revenue Sharing and that a member of ARPA be included on the Municipal/Provincial Committee referred to therein.
- Express concerns over continuing Community Facilities Enhancement Program.
- Investigating the changing atmosphere of recreational services in the Province in relation to Alberta Recreation and Parks mandate, the potential demise of community level recreation boards and the fragmentation of historic· recreation services delivery in Alberta.
- April saw the hiring of a new Executive Director.

1989

- The Advocacy Committee monitored the following issues:
- Municipal Statutes Review
- Provincial Recreation and Parks Strategic Plan
- Alberta Culture Strategic Plan
- CRC Funding Reductions
- STEP Funding Reductions
- The Sport Council Committee set-up a corresponding committee of municipal members to comment on sport delivery at the Municipal Government level. They also continued work on several projects involving: identification of the municipal role in the sport delivery system.
- The Core Committee (finance, resource development, planning) developed an outline for a system of resource development projects in the next year.
- A planning retreat was organized at Blue Lake Centre. The retreat was a step one in the process towards the development of a strategic plan.
- New Administrative Coordinator was hired.

1990

- A governance restructuring was approved by the Board to ensure financial sustainability and streamline committee work.
- All educational events, except the annual conference, were cancelled due to budget concerns.
- A Lobbying Strategy, developed by the Advocacy Committee, was approved at the AGM.

1991

- Advocacy focused on the University of Alberta's Recreation and Leisure Studies program, which was at risk of being cut. Efforts included a position paper, communications plan and member letter-writing campaign highlighting the program's importance.
- A volunteer database was created.
- The Education Policy Task Force presented a report to the Board to inform ARPA's future education development.
- The Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Committee (ISRC) hosted a National Forum on "Recreation's Contribution."

1992

- A change in leadership saw Paul Servos begin as Executive Director early in the year.
- Early work on the benefits of recreation began.
- An updated Career Guide was published.
- Advocacy focused on extending and replacing the CRC grant program. A letter-writing campaign generated more than 300 letters to government highlighting the program's importance.

1993

- Advocated for a grant program to replace the CRC grant.
- Contributed to the development of a new national vision for recreation through CPRA.
- Continued early work on the benefits of recreation.
- ARPA's casino fundraisers generated no funds, prior to the introduction of pooling policies.

1994

- Connected ARPA themes to the International Year of the Family.
- Contributed to the review and planning that led to the amalgamation of the Alberta Sport Council and the Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation.
- Created the Alberta Addendum to the Benefits of Recreation Casebook and launched speaker kits to support benefits of recreation workshops.
- Played a key role in updating CPRA's governance and membership model.
- Presented to the provincial Standing Committee on Community Services on "Beyond Important – Recreation is Essential."
- Hosted "Reinventing Government" with Ted Gaebler as a pre-conference workshop aimed at attracting non-members and generating revenue.
- Established the Past Presidents' Council.

1995

- The Energize Workshop, focused on education for elected officials, was incorporated into the ARPA Conference.
- Advocacy focused on the Lotteries Review.
- All ARPA members were added as CPRA members for an additional $10 fee.
- Met with the Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel regarding the future relationship between the two organizations.
- Began developing membership networks to support peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing.
- Met with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) regarding potential partnerships on benefits of recreation work in Alberta and Canada.

1996

- Partnered with Alberta TrailNet to host the Trails Conference.
- Published the Benefits into Action Guidebook.
- Led benefits of recreation training across North America.
- Introduced Recreation Alberta Online, ARPA's first website.
- Advocated with provincial Ministers and standing committees on the benefits of recreation, the cancellation of the MRTA grant program and changes to lottery funding.

1997

- Endorsed a Strategic Alliance with the Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel (AARFP).
- Advocated on the MR/TA grant program, lottery revenue distribution and the emergence of Dutch Elm Disease.
- Assisted with the development of The Benefits Catalogue.
- Continued developing Recreation Alberta Online and electronic communications with members.

1998

- Developed a professional development strategy to guide future investment in ARPA's educational offerings.
- Released Alberta Community Recreation Infrastructure: A Guide to Life Cycle Planning.
- Published the final issue of Recreation Alberta magazine as it transitioned to a more informal newsletter format.
- Secured the hosting of the 2000 CPRA Symposium in Lake Louise.
- Presented to the provincial Standing Committee on Community Services on the sector's infrastructure needs.

1999

- Undertook a comprehensive organizational review following the departure of ARPA's administration, reinforcing the need for ARPA and an expanded mandate.
- Conducted a search for a new Executive Director to support the expanded mandate.
- Through the ARPA Infrastructure Committee, helped establish an interdepartmental task force to review recreation infrastructure needs.
- Focused advocacy on growing concerns about the community recreation infrastructure deficit.
- Hosted a provincial think tank exploring priority issues facing Alberta's recreation and parks sector.



2000

- Secured a new Executive Director, Rick Curtis.
- Hosted the 2000 CPRA Conference in Lake Louise.
- Began field testing a recreation facility assessment tool developed in partnership with the City of Calgary.
- Established the Elsie McFarland Legacy Fund at the University of Alberta.
- Met with the Health and Safe Communities Standing Policy Committee to discuss priority issues for the recreation and parks sector.
- Reintroduced an annual golf tournament.

2001

- Celebrated ARPA's 50th Anniversary with a Legends Dinner and Golf Tournament hosted in partnership with Strathcona County, featuring a keynote address by the Honourable Peter Lougheed.
- Established the Recreation for Life Foundation.
- In partnership with the Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel (AARFP), advocated on rising utility costs affecting recreation facility operations across the province.
- Launched June is Recreation and Parks Month.
- Special projects included a play leadership training environmental scan, a recreation research framework, and an assessment of community recreation development and delivery in Alberta.

2002

- Government advocacy focused on positioning recreation and parks as an upstream component of the health and wellness sector.
- Developed program proposals as advocacy tools to support renewed investment in Urban Parks and Countryside Parks and Recreation Areas.
- The Infrastructure Committee continued developing facility assessment reports to advocate for increased investment in community recreation infrastructure.
- Helped establish the Alberta Healthy Living Network.

2003

- Hosted the first-ever Youth Development Through Recreation Services (YDRS) Symposium in Calgary.
- Advocacy focused on urban and countryside parks proposals and ARPA's infrastructure reports.
- Introduced regional director positions on the Board to improve member and regional communications.
- The "Active Communities" program entered its initial development phase.

2004

- Continued the community recreation infrastructure assessment study and facility condition assessments across the province.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation hired its first full-time development director.
- Continued Phase 2 research for the Recreation Industry Labour Market Analysis.
- Secured the Communities ChooseWell Challenge campaign on a one-year contract.
- Piloted play leadership development and training across the province.
- Advocacy focused on a provincial election strategy to elevate recreation and parks issues and opportunities.
- Began planning for the Vision 2015 project.

2005

- Hosted the Vision 2015 Leaders Forum in Edmonton.
- Completed the Alberta Labour Market Analysis project.
- Hosted the first Parks Forum in Canmore in March.
- Following the election, developed a briefing paper for all new Ministers.
- Hosted nearly 1,000 delegates at the national CPRA Conference in Edmonton, alongside four other symposia:
- Youth Development through Recreation Service Symposium
- Active Leisure for Persons with Disabilities Symposium
- Trails and Pathways Symposium
- True Sport in the Community Symposium

2006

- Piloted the Continuous Professional Learning System (CPLS), enabling ARPA members to recognize their professional development.
- Released Foundations for Action: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Alberta.
- Launched the Alberta Active Communities initiative with public and private support.
- Released Investing in Healthy People & Communities through Recreation and Parks Infrastructure, the culmination of more than four years of research and development led by ARPA's Infrastructure Committee.
- Secured renewable Government of Alberta funding for the Communities ChooseWell Challenge.
- Assumed provincial coordination of the Communities in Bloom Alberta program.
- Launched the Everybody gets to play™ initiative in Alberta.
- Released Assessing the Proximate Value of Parks and Open Space to Residential Properties.
- Transitioned the ARPA newsletter to the digital REConnect.

2007

- Secured the Major Community Facilities Grant Program through advocacy for increased community recreation infrastructure funding.
- Continued the Alberta Active Communities initiative.
- Held the second biennial Parks Forum in Canmore.
- Signed formal protocol agreements with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA).
- Developed the Facility Inventory Tracking System (FITS) to collect facility data from across the province.
- Launched HIGH FIVE in Alberta, with ARPA announced as the province's authorized service provider.

2008

- Advocacy focused on a provincial election strategy highlighting recreation and parks issues and priorities.
- Hosted a Provincial Planning Forum in November to identify issues and challenges facing ARPA and the sector.
- Released Investing in Alberta – Community Parks and Open Space.
- Released the Public Perception Study on the Use/Benefits of Local Recreation & Parks Services.
- Secured $6.5 million over four years from the Rural Alberta's Development Fund and private investors for the Active. Creative. Engaged. Communities initiative.
- ARPA leadership played a significant role in restructuring the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA).

2009

- The renewed Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA), with an updated federation governance model, officially launched in July.
- Completed a Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between ARPA, the University of Alberta and Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation.
- Advocacy focused on a provincial recreation policy, the Land Use Framework and Alberta's Plan for Parks.
- Released several publications, including:
- In Alberta... Recreation and Parks Matter
- AfterSchool Recreation Initiatives
- Children In Nature
- Healthy by Nature: Up Close and Personal—Investing in Community Parks, Open Space, and Nature Education
- Introduced Kids at Hope in Alberta.
- The ACE Communities initiative was in full effect, including the introduction of the Lieutenant Governor's Leadership for Active Communities Awards, spearheaded by ARPA.





2010

- Acquired and assumed governance and operational oversight of the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN) and the National Recreation Database.
- Offered the Building Leadership Capacity course.
- Advocacy focused on Active Alberta, the provincial government's efforts to develop policies and strategies for recreation, active living and sport.
- Released several research publications, including:
- Public Funding of Recreation in Alberta
- The Role of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Regional Planning
- Stone Soup: The Recipe for an After School Recreation Strategy in Alberta
- Developed and launched the Benefits Hub, an online Recreation Benefits Catalogue, through the ACE Communities initiative.
- Introduced the SOGO Active program to help youth challenge themselves and their friends to get moving.

2011

- Celebrated ARPA's 60th Anniversary.
- Hosted the 2011 National Recreation Summit in Lake Louise.
- Launched the Service Excellence Program to help municipal governments identify the organizational capacity needed for excellence in programs, parks, facilities, community building, leadership and management.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation focused on bringing the vision of the Norman Kwong Centre of Excellence to reality.
- Hosted the first Provincial Dialogue: Collaborative Planning and Action for Community Sport and Recreation Development workshop.
- Advocacy remained focused on the provincial government's Active Alberta Policy and a provincial election strategy.
- Released Play: It's Serious Business.



2012

- Rick Curtis retired after 11 years as CEO, and Bill Wells was hired as his successor.
- Developed formal partnerships with organizations including the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (now Rural Municipalities of Alberta), the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies and the Alberta Community and Co-operatives Association.
- The ACE Communities initiative sunsetted, while the Alberta Community Strategy project continued some of its work.
- Supported development of the National Recreation Agenda through CPRA.

2013

- Hosted an expanded Provincial Forum with partner organizations and ARPA volunteer leaders.
- Began development of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) Professional Development Certificate program.
- Participated in CPRA roundtables on the National Recreation Agenda.
- Co-hosted the International Federation of Parks and Recreation Administrators (IFPRA) as part of the ARPA Annual Conference in Lake Louise.
- Advocacy focused on creating an Alberta After School Recreation initiative.
- Added Yardstick Benchmarking services as a new member offering.

2014

- Hosted the Provincial Forum in May, providing an opportunity to contribute to the National Recreation Framework process.
- Advocacy centred on the Municipal Government Act review. The Parks and Open Spaces Committee provided input on parks-related concerns within proposed changes.
- Launched the Recreation and Parks Excellence Series to strengthen recreation and parks organizations.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation hosted the Recreation Industry Awards of Excellence in Olds.

2015

- Pathways to Wellbeing: A Framework for Recreation in Canada was released following years of consultation and development.
- The CPRA Professional Development Certification program was officially launched across Canada and developed and administered by ARPA.
- Secured support to host a Pan-Canadian Parks Conference in Alberta in 2017.
- Partnered with the provincial government on a Municipal Recreation Engagement Strategy.
- Added the Connecting Through Research stream to the Annual Conference.
- Advocacy again focused on a provincial election strategy.

2016

- An AGM resolution strengthened ARPA's efforts to build relationships with and support Indigenous communities, formally marking the beginning of its Journey of Reconciliation, now known as Walking with Indigenous Communities.
- Completed The Way We Walk in Life, an environmental scan exploring opportunities for ARPA to build relationships with Indigenous communities.
- Continued efforts to establish a national infrastructure database of recreation and parks facilities.
- Advocacy focused on establishing a Wellness Foundation in Alberta.
- Submitted a briefing report on the Modernized Municipal Government Act, with some ARPA recommendations incorporated into the new Act.
- Co-hosted the National Parks Summit in Canmore with the Alberta Environment and Parks Ministry.
- Expanded the Provincial Forum to include senior municipal leaders from across the province.
- Co-hosted the first Alberta Aquatics Forum with the Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel (AARFP).





2017

- Hosted the Pan-Canadian Parks Conference in Banff with park partners, contributing to the development of the Parks for All Framework.
- Advocacy focused on changes to the Municipal Government Act and supporting CPRA advocacy for a recreation stream within the Social Infrastructure Fund.
- Hosted an MLA reception to raise awareness of ARPA and the recreation and parks sector, with more than 20 MLAs and additional staff attending.
- Was selected as the Secretariat organization supporting World Urban Parks.
- Established a bursary for the Indigenous Sport and Recreation Post-Baccalaureate Certificate at the University of Alberta.
- Held a workshop exploring the unique issues facing rural recreation in Alberta

2018

- ARPA was honoured by the Blackfoot Confederacy with an Honour Song.
- Signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Siksika Health Services.
- Convened the Greener Facilities Conference and Expo to help facility operators reduce operating costs and environmental impacts.
- Held the inaugural Leaders Summit in Kananaskis Country.

2020

- COVID-19 arrived in March during the Parks Forum in Canmore.
- The pandemic became the primary challenge and focus for ARPA and the recreation and parks sector as changing restrictions affected programs, facilities and operations.
- Modified programs and services for online delivery.
- Supported several Town Halls with the Government of Alberta to address questions about changing COVID-19 restrictions affecting recreation and parks programs and facilities.
- Released the Alberta Labour Market Study for recreation and parks and secured provincial funding for an addendum examining COVID-19's human resource impacts on the sector.
- Hosted a modified hybrid ARPA Conference, with 75 delegates at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge and more than 325 attending online.

2019

- Steve Allan stepped into the Interim Executive Director position.
- Hosted the first Parks School, providing two days of practical training and education focused on park operations.
- Hosted the inaugural Alberta Healthy Communities Symposium in partnership with Communities ChooseWell and the Alberta Cancer Prevention Legacy Fund.
- With partners, hosted the Elder and Youth Capacity Building Culture Camp at the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary's adventure site in Kananaskis.
- Launched the Play Charter and Mobile Adventure Playground guides in partnership with the City of Calgary, the University of Alberta and the provincial government.
- Partnered with the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) to host ARPA's largest-ever Conference in Lake Louise, with more than 620 delegates.
- Advocacy focused on a provincial election strategy to share key messages and priorities.
- Began a comprehensive labour market study for the recreation and parks sector with Government of Alberta support.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation shifted toward building endowments through the Legends of Recreation funds to support ongoing professional development for students and others.

2021

- Continued navigating changing COVID-19 restrictions and their impacts.
- The existing ARPA Board of Directors' terms were extended by one year due to the pandemic.
- Held frequent town halls to help inform the recreation and parks sector about changing COVID-19 policies and restrictions.
- Leaders Summit, YDRS Symposium and ChooseWell's Alberta Healthy Communities Symposium moved online.
- Held the inaugural Treaty 7 Elder Capacity Camp and Cultural Celebration, addressing challenges facing Elders during COVID-19, as well as the impacts of intergenerational trauma and the Residential School legacy.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation grew its endowments to nearly $140,000.

2022

- Marked the return of in-person education events, while the recreation and parks sector continued to experience the pandemic's impacts on program planning, human resources and operations.
- Held the SPARC Alberta Summit in partnership with Sport for Life, with funding support from Makadiff Sports.
- Through support from the Government of Alberta, helped distribute nearly $1 million through the Return to Play Grant program to help children and youth access sport and recreation programs following the lifting of pandemic restrictions.
- Coordinated the 2022 Alberta Recreation Survey in partnership with the Government of Alberta.
- ARPA's contract as Secretariat for World Urban Parks concluded.

2023

- Secured a multi-year grant from Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade for a workforce strategies project that became the Community Compass initiative.
- Led the sector-wide "SPAR Matters" provincial election strategy, which helped influence the incoming government to pledge $80 million in community recreation infrastructure funding over four years.
- Received the opportunity to recognize 50 individuals for outstanding service to the recreation and parks sector with Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medals.
- Secured a multi-year grant to support the return of the Energize Workshop, focused on education for municipal elected officials.
- Launched the Game Plan for SPARC Alberta 2.0, a collaborative path forward for the sport, physical activity and recreation sector.

2024

- Launched the Community Compass initiative, focused initially on career awareness in the recreation and parks sector.
- Increased focus on advocacy by engaging a government relations firm to support this work.
- Formally launched Walking with Indigenous Communities: ARPA's Action Map with a pipe ceremony to further document and support ARPA's journey of reconciliation.
- Launched a new membership portal to enhance member engagement and data collection.
- The Jasper wildfires forced the Annual Conference and Energize Workshop to move to the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise.
- Completed ARPA's final year as provincial coordinator for Communities in Bloom Alberta, with responsibilities transferred to a dedicated non-profit organization.
- Parks and Recreation Ontario brought HIGH FIVE coordination under its operations, ending ARPA's authorized provider status in Alberta.

2025

- Continued Community Compass, developing resources to help recreation and parks employers foster a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Undertook Phase One of a governance review to ensure future sustainability and relevance.
- As part of ARPA's 75th Anniversary, a volunteer committee began collecting and sharing ARPA's history, including reconnecting with alumni.
- The Recreation for Life Foundation formally dissolved, with ARPA assuming responsibility for fund development.
- Communities ChooseWell celebrated 20 years of supporting healthy eating and active living in communities across Alberta.
- Partnered with the Alberta Association of Recreation Facility Personnel (AARFP) on joint advocacy focused on community recreation infrastructure.

2026

- Celebrated ARPA's 75th Anniversary with two public events as part of an expanded June is Recreation and Parks Month program.
- The Community Compass program concluded, with its legacy continuing through evergreen content and resources.
- Undertook the second year of the governance review to modernize structures and ensure ARPA remains sustainable, relevant and responsive into the future.
- Signed contracts to assume coordination of Winter Walk Day and Ageless Motion Day from SHAPE Alberta.



1962 Recreation Leadership School

ARPA Trailblazers

Building a Legacy Through Recreation and Parks

For 75 years, the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association has been shaped by people who saw possibilities where others saw challenges. They were educators, advocates, administrators, coaches, volunteers and community builders. They believed recreation and parks could strengthen communities, improve quality of life and create opportunities for everyone to participate.

Many of these early leaders helped establish the foundation on which Alberta's recreation and parks sector continues to grow today. They were, in every sense, ARPA Trailblazers.

Among them was **Alan "Al" Affleck, a professor at the University of Alberta and a pioneer in recreation education. Al taught at the U of A from 1951 to 1983, inspiring generations of students and future leaders.** Known as a "sparker" and "rumble chairman," he brought energy, humour and spirit to ARPA and the broader recreation movement. He edited the Association's first newsletter in 1956 and encouraged colleagues across the province to share their knowledge and ideas. His enthusiasm helped create connections that would strengthen the profession for decades.

Dr. Elsie McFarland was another pioneering force. A teacher, government administrator and University of Alberta professor, she became the first woman in Canada to earn a PhD in Recreation Administration. She helped advance recreation education, advocated for stronger provincial and municipal recreation systems, and encouraged women to take leadership roles in the sector. Her career was marked by numerous firsts, but perhaps her greatest legacy was the people she inspired and the collaborative approach she brought to recreation development.

For Harry Boothman, parks were places where trees and children should grow together. A horticulturalist and later Parks Superintendent and Director of Calgary Parks/Recreation, he championed the idea that parks and recreation belonged together. His influence could be seen in Calgary's parks, pathways, tree planting and major developments, including Confederation Park. His vision helped shape the integrated parks and recreation model that became increasingly common across Alberta and Canada.

Don Moore demonstrated the power of recreation to build communities. As Red Deer's recreation director for more than two decades, he helped develop facilities, community schools, golf courses and Waskasoo Park. He was also a coach, mentor, volunteer and advocate, contributing to ARPA and recreation organizations across the country. His influence extended well beyond his professional career, becoming a family tradition of recreation, volunteerism and community service carried forward by his children and grandchildren.

Jack Boddington brought a passion for sport, aquatics and public speaking to his work in recreation. From Grande Prairie to Edmonton, he contributed to municipal recreation and played roles in the development of Fort Edmonton Park, the

Muttart Conservatory and the Kinsmen Aquatic Centre. A president of ARPA and frequent conference speaker and master of ceremonies, Jack encouraged others to get involved, take action and make the most of opportunities.

Dr. M.L. "Maury" Van Vliet helped build the educational and organizational foundations of recreation in Alberta. As an early ARA president, he supported calls for provincial leadership in recreation, stronger municipal funding and the establishment of a recreation degree program at the University of Alberta. His leadership at the U of A helped establish recreation education as a discipline and contributed to the development of generations of professionals.

And from a small community came another important lesson in the value of sharing knowledge. Ted Van Biezen, who spent his career in Three Hills, championed aquatics, recreation programming and professional development. He built a community pool, expanded programs and facilities, wrote resolutions advocating for small communities and remained an active ARPA member for decades. He believed in learning, collaboration and camaraderie—and shared what he learned with colleagues across the province.

George Debney similarly carried recreation knowledge throughout Alberta. After a career in the military, he became a recreation director and participated in the Recreation Directors certificate program developed through the work of Elsie McFarland and the Alberta Recreation Association. He trained instructors and lifeguards, supported regional recreation organizations and advocated for the Alberta Summer Games. His son Gary would later continue the family tradition with a career in recreation and parks.



These Trailblazers did more than build programs, facilities and professional organizations. They built a culture. They mentored others, shared knowledge, opened doors, advocated for investment and demonstrated—through their work and their lives—the difference recreation and parks can make.

As ARPA celebrates 75 years, their stories remind us that a legacy is not simply something we inherit. It is something we continue to build. The work of today's recreation and parks leaders is connected to the vision, energy and commitment of those who came before—and the next generation of Trailblazers is already beginning to shape what comes next.



75th Fundraiser Contributors

Special thanks goes out to these friends and partners for their noteworthy contribution to the ARPA 75th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign!







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