

Recreation in Nutley | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

RECREATION IN NUTLEY

MRS. CHARLES J. FRUEHAN

IN 1933 a Recreation Center at Lincoln School was opened under the sponsorship of a small committee consisting of the police chief, probation officer, the judge and two citizens at large.

The following year, 1934, the State Emergency Relief Administration, Leisure Time Division, and later the Works Projects Administration, in cooperation with a Nutley Recreational Committee, Charles Young, Chairman, Frederick H. Young, municipal director, formally established recreation in Nutley. The local share toward the State budget was \$1,000, which went to pay for the use of an expanded program in Lincoln, Washington and Park Schools. There was no appropriation for the equipment, so many home-made games were used, and food sales and benefit basketball and football games raised needed funds.

By 1942 this was no longer considered an emergency measure, and Recreation was recognized by the Board of Commissioners as an integral part of the Town's functions. The budget amounted to \$3,444, and provided for an eight-week summer playground program at five centers and softball for the men all summer, as well as basketball two nights weekly at Park (now the Senior High) and Lincoln Schools, for under 300 registered participants.

A community Council had functioned for a neighborhood Recreation Center at Washington School, but after one year all activity was centralized at Park School (now the Senior High). A volunteer Recreation Committee carried the program under Commissioner Joseph Blum, Department of Health & Welfare.

In 1948, the Recreation Committee became a part of the Department of Parks & Public Property, under Commissioner A. T. DeMuro. The \$10,000 budget provided year-round programs to 3,314 registered boys, girls and men, with 5 centers of summer playgrounds, dancing, basketball, softball, table tennis and a Hallowe'en Parade. The Recreation Committee still functioned, assisted by qualified personnel from the local teaching staff. The weekly dances drew 400-500 Junior and Senior teen-agers; the Men's Softball League had an all-time high record of 23 teams; the "REC" softball, with 28 teams, and "REC" basketball, with 42 teams of teen-agers, flourished.

During this time, the fathers of many of Nutley's boys gave thought to a Little League Baseball program. Under the chairmanship of Howard Stoddard, Sr., they canvassed the Town and raised about \$9,000 for fences, backstops, dugouts, field houses, and the development of fields. Three leagues were formed, the National, American and Central, playing at Reinheimer, Father Glotzbach and Yanticaw County Parks respectively. Dugouts and fences were built in the two Town parks.

A Memorial to Father Glotzbach was planned and was formally dedicated in May 1956, during Commissioner Carl A. Orechio's term of office.

In May 1956, with the completion of the Town Hall addition, the newly elected Commissioner, Carl A. Orechio, was able to have a department office at the Town Hall. Mrs. Charles J. Fruehan, who had been a member of the Recreation Committee since 1944 and served as program chairman and secretary since 1948, opened the office with the Commissioner. She functioned as the first paid executive-secretary of the Recreation Division from this time on.

There have always been many outstanding local civic-minded citizens serving on the Recreation Committee. Perhaps longest in point of service, is Miss Ann Troy, who was with the first group working with the Emergency Relief Administration back in 1934, and who is still actively serving with the present committee.

In June 1957, upon the death of Miss Flora Loudon, the department planned to name the new park at Hancox Avenue in her honor. She had served with the Committee as chairman of personnel and program from 1942-1948, and continued an active member until her death. A bronze plaque in her memory was dedicated in the Loudon Park in October 1960.

Mrs. Helen O. McNeill joined the committee back in the W.P.A. days in 1938, serving as secretary until her death in 1949.

In 1956 the budget provided continued activity for 3,433 registered participants. This number jumped by 1,000 for the following year with a budget of \$15,000 and two new programs, i.e., indoor roller-skating and Pee Wee basketball; an additional summer playground center; and sponsorship in part of the Nutley Colonels.

The 1958 budget of \$17,500 provided for two more new programs, i.e., Midget football and the B.A.L. (Boys Athletic League) at the Recreation Center in the Municipal Garage. A total of 4,652 registered participants took part in the activities.

In 1959 the registration showed an increase of 1,570 - a total of 6,222. With the addition of three new programs, i.e., bowling for boys and girls, crafts and games for boys and girls, and summer block dances for the High Schoolers - the budget was reduced drastically by \$2,500, or a net of \$15,000.

The 1960 budget is \$15,350.