

Oral History Interview

with

FOREST V. GUSTAFSON

Director, Recreation Department  
Montgomery County, Maryland

October 12, 1971

By Maureen K. Hinkle

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Date of Birth: Nov. 14, 1910  
Married, two daughters

Native of Minneapolis, Minnesota

Education: Central High School, Minneapolis, Minn.  
University of Minnesota - Bachelor of Science, 1933  
University of Minnesota - Master of Education, 1940

Institute on Recreation Administration. National  
Recreation Association, in connection with National  
Recreation Congress - 1956, 57, 58, 59 and 1960.

Various Conferences and Institutes - National and State.

#### Professional Employment Record:

- May 1952 - Present -- Director, Department of Recreation for Montgomery  
County, County Office Building, Rockville, Md. 20850
- Feb. 1949 - May, 1952 - Superintendent, Division of Recreation, Department  
of Parks and Recreation, Detroit, Michigan
- Feb. 1946 - Feb. 1949 - Superintendent, Department of Recreation,  
Belleville, Illinois
- 1943 - Feb. 1946 - Lt. (Sr. Grade), Welfare and Recreation Officer,  
United States Navy

#### Professional Organizations:

1952 to Present Maryland Recreation and Park Society  
National Recreation and Park Association  
American Parks and Recreation Society

#### Past Activities:

- 1956-57 - President, Maryland Recreation and Parks Society  
1957 - Geographical Representative, American Recreation Society  
1960 - Research Committee, American Recreation Society  
1961 - Asst. Treasurer, American Recreation Society  
1960 - Research Committee Chairman, National Recreation Association  
1965-66 - President, Montgomery County Swim League

INTERVIEW WITH FOREST V. D. GUSTAFSON

HINKLE: This is Maureen Hinkle on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County. Today, October 12, 1971, I am interviewing Forest Gustafson, who is and has been the Director of the Recreation Department of Montgomery County since 1952. Mr. Gustafson received his bachelor of science degree from the University of Minnesota in 1933, and his M.A. in education from the University of Minnesota in 1940. From 1946-49 he was superintendant of the Department of Recreation in Belleville, Illinois. From February 1949 until May 1952 he was superintendant of the Division of Recreation for the Department of Parks and Recreation, Detroit, Michigan. His activities include the President of the Maryland Recreation and Parks Society, and he's served on several committees of the Maryland Recreation and Parks Society, the National Recreation Association, the American Recreation Society, and the American Recreation Society.

Mr. Gustafson, you've been here since the world began, as far as recreation in Montgomery County is concerned. It was made a separate department in 1952...

GUSTAFSON Yes, that's true, but not since it began exactly, because the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission did provide recreation program services as early as 1942. They provided summer playgrounds, and during the war they had some day camps, or day centers, and some teen activities, and some limited seasonal sports programs. Then the total program provided by the Commission, up to that point, was transferred to Montgomery County, effective beginning with the summer playground season of 1953. At that time there were 43 playgrounds, and certain seasonal sports programs taking place. The County, of course, has grown tremendously since that time. It has more than doubled in its population, and we have seen comparable growth in recreation services. The County now has over 120 playgrounds. It has some 45 to 50 indoor sports locations utilizing the various secondary school gymnasiums in the county. It has fall and spring playground programs which include a variety of subjects--seasonal sports, arts and crafts, informal music and dramatics. A teen club program began in 1953 with seven during that first year. There are some 28 teen clubs now providing social and recreation services to junior and senior high school age youngsters. We have two community recreation centers. One is Wheaton, and one is in Bethesda. There were formerly called Youth

Centers, until this past year when the name was officially changed at the request of the Recreation Board and the County government. The change was made by the MNCPPC who actually owns the Center in both cases, and maintains them. There is a third Center that will be open within a few weeks, the Long Branch Recreation Center. The gymnasium is nearing completion.

HINKLE: Where is that located?

GUSTAFSON: It's located just off of University Boulevard and Piney Branch Road, right at the creek just one block from University Boulevard. That has a gymnasium. It has a small recreation building that has been there a number of years, and will have a small recreation room built in the new structure in addition to the gym; it does have an outdoor swimming pool complex which opened on approximately the 29th of July this past summer.

HINKLE: Is it a public pool?

GUSTAFSON: It's a public swimming pool. I might indicate some of the other things that have been added over the years. The senior citizens programs began with the construction of the Youth Centers because we've had senior citizens activities in the Centers back as far as 1961. That program has expanded to a number of locations. It was expanded to Wheaton two years later. The services provided in the Presbyterian Church in Takoma Park--the services provided at the Fenwick apartment house for the elderly--it's provided for the other housing project for the elderly, Holly Hall in the Silver Spring area. Services will be provided at the new Takoma Towers, a public housing project for senior citizens. The County is now in the process of building a senior citizens center on Forest Glen Road, which would be the first actual facility constructed just for the senior citizens.

HINKLE: Just for their use?

GUSTAFSON: Just for their use only. It will be staffed by two full-time professional people, and some part time staff. The building is a \$250,000 facility.

HINKLE: Who owns it?

GUSTAFSON: The County owns this and it's being placed on MNCPPC land, which I think points out the close working relationship between the two agencies.

HINKLE: How did that come about?

GUSTAFSON: Originally the senior citizens themselves have asked for a center of their own for a number of years.

HINKLE: How many are there?

GUSTAFSON: This is the first one, but the senior citizens have, I would say, at the Wheaton Center (there are 500 members now), average attendance of 200 every Wednesday. And it was this group that spearheaded the move for a senior citizens center as such. The MNCPPC had some monies in their budget two years ago that was diverted from another project that was not considered that high a priority; and the County Council, in looking at the proposed plans for a \$150,000 facility, recognized that there was need for a bigger facility, and added \$100,000 to the project--actually it's now \$262,000, I believe--and asked the Commission to work with them, with the County providing the funds for the project, and the Commission providing the land. This has been done. The monies are appropriated, the construction is underway, and there has been a ground-breaking ceremony, so this will be a big step forward for senior citizens parks.

HINKLE: I find this very progressive. I'm sure there are no more senior citizens in Montgomery County than in the adjacent counties, and yet isn't Montgomery County the only one that has public funds and public facilities for the senior citizens?

GUSTAFSON: This, I believe, is the first facility built for this purpose. Prince George's, however, does have a senior citizens program that's broader than just recreation. Of course, Montgomery County's will be too, though recreation will be the prime activity in this facility. The services to senior citizens go beyond that, and there is a senior citizens commission on aging in the county.

Going on with the development of program services to the county, there was no organized public baseball program back in 1953. Now there are some 350 teams playing

regularly organized ball. The Department of Recreation sponsors adult athletic teams. The teams themselves pay a franchise fee to pay the cost of the officiating and the cost of awards. There were a few teams back in 1952; there are now in the neighborhood of 125 basketball teams, 80 touch football teams, approximately 150 softball teams.

HINKLE: Do you have facilities for these?

GUSTAFSON: These facilities are provided by the MNCPPC, and I think it would be an appropriate to point out the very close working relationship between the two agencies. The Park and Planning Commission is the facility, the land, and the maintenance agency for the County parks and recreation. We are the recreation program agency utilizing the facilities of this Commission to the greatest extent possible, receiving priority for the use of not only their indoor facilities, but for their outdoor facilities as well. This leads to another point, that is, that the Department of Recreation, being a program agency, has no facilities of its own - with only one or two exceptions.

HINKLE: What are they?

GUSTAFSON: The Glenmont swimming pool, which is again built by the county, maintained by the county, and operated by the county on Park and Planning land, just the same as the senior citizens center that I just spoke of.

The other agency that plays a very prominent and important role, of course, is the Board of Education. With the public schools' 175 buildings or more in the county, we utilize the elementary schools. We utilize them for roughly 90 summer playgrounds. We utilize 45 to 50 gymnasiums. We utilize 70 or 80 elementary schools for spring and fall sports programs, and seasonal programs. So they play a very fundamental role in making facilities available to the Department of Recreation. They make them available at a modest cost. The cost is only the cost of the actual custodian required to provide the service. If the building is already open, they charge nothing. They don't charge anything for utilities, heat, light, etc.

They do charge if a custodian has to be called in on a weekend to pen a program for recreational services. The Department reimburses them at a rate of \$5 an hour for custodial services. The Department of Recreation gets one other very important service from the Board of Education, and that is transportation. The public schools make available to the Department, school buses during the summer months at a very nominal fee--for 15¢ a mile, and the cost of the driver's time. During the summer months we provide very extensive transportation for swimming, inter-summer athletic competition, special events, and we utilize school buses at certain other times of the year for services at the same time.

We budget \$125,000 a year actually for reimbursement to the Board of Education for custodial and transportation services. The County Council, of course, is the responsible body that approves budgets. The Department is responsible directly to the County Executive, and presents the Department's budget requests to the County Executive who in turn submits his recommendations for the budget, including recreation, to the County Council for their approval. This year the budget is \$2,400,000. Roughly two-thirds of that comes from tax monies---one-third from fees and charges, which brings up a very important matter. That is the matter of fees and charges and how they should be apportioned in a program such as this. There are certain specialized services in the County Government that can be paid for and should be paid for by the user of that service. Certain specialized recreational activities fall in that category. We have the social-cultural program that includes things like bridge, social dancing, square dancing, ballet and tap, modern dancing. We have programs like cake decorating. We have programs of slimnastics. We have physical activity programs to keep people fit. We have provided a variety of arts and crafts programs for children and adults on a fee basis. These things, I think, are necessary where they serve a relatively small number of people. The taxpayers should not bear the entire burden of these programs. For these, they don't bear any burden, except a very small administrative cost. The program itself is a \$350,000 program that pays for all out-of-pocket

cash costs for the instructor, custodial fees, things that are required for materials and supplies, a portion of the overhead administrative and promotional costs that are connected with this program. The swimming pools, too, are on a self-supporting basis. The Glenmont pool is the first of its kind in the county. It's a large swimming pool complex with an olympic-size swimming pool, 50 meters by 60 feet wide. Through that pool we have served 100,000 people each of the last two years--a hundred thousand swims, that is--including instruction, some competitive swimming, but mostly recreational in character. The operating budget of the swimming pool is about \$50,000 for the year. The income from the pool for the last two years averaged \$70,000. The difference between those two figures, of course, is the amount of monies that can be applied towards capital. It has not actually been budgeted that way, or pictured that way, or interpreted that way, but this, in effect, is what it amounts to. The Long Branch swimming pool that opened this July is a smaller complex, and will not cost as much, but will bring in monies to cover the entire operating cost. The Piney Branch Middle School swimming pool which is being constructed in conjunction with the new school in Takoma Park will be paid for by county funds and operated by the Department of Recreation. It will be completed by February of next year.

HINKLE: Will that be a public pool?

GUSTAFSON: It will be a public pool, and during the daytime the school will use it for classes. There will be no charge. After school hours, evenings, and weekends, there will be a nominal charge to defray the cost of operating expenses.

HINKLE: During school hours, will it be opened to other elementary schools?

GUSTAFSON: It will be determined by the public schools, but I suspect that other neighborhood elementary school children will be invited to come in and be given periods of time so that facility can be utilized to its fullest. So here again, you see the evidence of cooperation between the various public agencies. We are working closely together.



HINKLE: How do you determine where these pools are going to be?

GUSTAFSON: We have been interested in having a thorough study and master plan developed for Montgomery County, but we haven't had the monies appropriated to do a complete job, so I would have to say that this was the staff judgment primarily that determined the locations. I think the Glenmont pool has borne out the importance of locating a pool where there are lots of single-family dwellings, and where there is a great need and where a pool can be self-supporting. The Long Branch pool has been constructed in an extremely needy area, an area called TESS (Takoma-East Silver Spring), where there is a deterioration in the community generally, and the county government is attempting to meet the deterioration, to stop it, to turn the clock back, so to speak, by providing additional services. One of these services is recreation. So that is why the pool at Long Branch is at one end of the TESS area and the Piney Branch Middle School pool at the other end of the TESS area. Now the Piney Branch Middle School pool will only be roughly 50% self-supporting in terms of operating expenses, because the daytime hours will be free of charge, I assume, and the after-school hours in an indoor pool do not bring in the kind of revenue that can be anticipated in an outdoor facility. It will render a mighty valuable service.

HINKLE: Is that the Takoma Park Middle School?

GUSTAFSON: It's now called the Piney Branch Middle School. It is next to the Takoma Park Junior High School. It is one and the same, yes.

HINKLE: And Tom Poor is the principal?

GUSTAFSON: Yes. I think I haven't mentioned up to now--and that is the fact that the recreation services of Montgomery County are provided in the Recreation District of Montgomery County which includes the entire county, with the exceptions of Rockville, corporate limits, Gaithersburg, and Washington Grove. All other areas of this county are served through the Department of Recreation regular services.

HINKLE: Why were these exempt?

GUSTAFSON: Because the City of Rockville had an excellent program of its own.

It was a substantially large town at the time this was granted and it's grown steadily ever since. They're doing a fine job. I personally feel that it would be better if they supplemented the services of recreation that the county might offer, in cooperation with the county rather than have a separate department. This proposal was made in the so-called Public Administration Service report in 1961 which felt that there was a fragmentation of services in the county where the separate jurisdictions operate. They pointed out that in the field of recreation the supplemental services by the Takoma Park City itself in cooperation with the County Department of Recreation was working in a very beautiful fashion.

HINKLE: Takoma Park does operate that way?

GUSTAFSON: They do, and the relationships have been outstanding, most cooperative, and we've been helpful to each other and they are part of the Recreation District, but they supplement the services.

HINKLE: They existed also?

GUSTAFSON: They existed also, but they weren't given the exemption, because they didn't feel the need, as I understand it. Gaithersburg was given that exemption because they requested it with a very strong plea, and the County Council saw fit to give them this authority and responsibility. They do not have as well organized and developed a program of recreation yet as the City of Rockville, but they have full-time leadership now and are moving ahead, and I assume that in due time they also will be a very substantial and capable Department. The fragmentation of services on the edges of these corporate bodies is still a problem. Whom do we serve? Does Rockville serve a person who goes to school in Rockville, but lives in the outskirts of the county? This type of situation goes both ways and applies not only to Rockville, but Gaithersburg.

HINKLE: It amounts to a certain amount of competition, too, doesn't it?

GUSTAFSON: It hasn't to any great extent. We have worked out some cooperative arrangements with Gaithersburg to serve these fringe people, and because Rockville's position has been enlightened we've had no problems on the outskirts of Rockville, but fundamentally there is something to be said for this statement by the PAS report of 1961 referring to fragmentation of services.

HINKLE: How far back does the Rockville exception go?

GUSTAFSON: I think that has always been there. They actually were not part of the Recreation District in 1953 when Montgomery County established its Department. They at first provided their services on a part-time basis, and then after that--I'm not sure of the exact year--some 3-4 years probably, maybe around 1957, they employed a full-time Director and Department, and they've built up an excellent Department, and they deserve full credit for that.

HINKLE: How far back does the Gaithersburg exemption go?

GUSTAFSON: To 1961, and that situation developed when the Recreation District was extended from the lower suburban county to the upper county.

HINKLE: Until then...

GUSTAFSON: It just served the suburban county until 1961, roughly, and then it extended to the upper county.

HINKLE: That was because it was so sparsely populated?

GUSTAFSON: Yes. They hadn't felt the need. There hadn't been, up to that time, a strong demand, and when the demand was recommended, there was a public hearing. As a result of that public hearing there were three exemptions and the extension of the District to the entire county.

HINKLE: It's fantastic growth.

GUSTAFSON: Yes. It has grown tremendously over the years, there's no question about it. One other feature of the Department services is provided at the Seneca Creek Camp, which was purchased by the MNCPPC at the request of the county government. Location is on Cloppers Mill Road just west of Germantown.

There are some 60 acres of land. At that point there was a building that had been a dormitory used by a private camp a few years ago, with space for about 50 residents. There were six geodesic huts that had space for another 50 people, and a main building which included a residential facility for a caretaker and a small recreation room. The Department of Recreation recommended approximately four years ago that this be acquired. The County Manager requested that this be acquired by the MNCPPC, with the stipulation, the understanding, that it would be operated by the Department of Recreation. This did take place. Improvements have been made at the camp. A second bathhouse has been built, the small swimming pool that was there has been maintained. Year-around program services are being provided for there. The summer period has been utilized as a summer day camp. This past summer we had over 400 children participate for a full two-week day camp period.

HINKLE: Was this the first time?

GUSTAFSON: This was the first time it was full. The two years before, we gave the service free to underprivileged children and couldn't fill it up.

Free. We could not fill this facility up!

HINKLE: Did they have to be from Montgomery County?

GUSTAFSON: Yes. There are plenty of needy children, but they could not be reached. We worked through the Health Department, Community Development, Social Services, through the public schools, and the camp was only two-thirds full. So we recommended for operation in 1971 that it go on a fee basis, at \$40 a person for a two-week period. We went over capacity, and needed a fifth period. We kept 25 special slots open for needy children, so that we would be serving the underprivileged as well. They had deluxe service: swimming twice a day, nature study, camp craft, outings, fishing, athletics, everything. It was an excellent program, and by making that charge we went to an average of 110 children per period instead of some 60-65 a year ago when there was no charge.

HINKLE: What happened to those children who had gone the previous two years?

GUSTAFSON: Many of these children could afford to pay and they probably came in on a pay basis. We are going to take care of the children who have need. Now that camp can't take care of all needs. But the Board of Education is building an outdoor education center in the upper Rock Creek part called Lake Bernard Frank area.

HINKLE: Is that the same as Needwood?

GUSTAFSON: No, it's not Needwood. It's about a mile or two away from Needwood. This is the upper north branch of Rock Creek. There is a lake there, there is a Park and Planning nature center, and there will be an outdoor education center. This came from funds through the State under the Land and Water Conservation Fund of the Federal Government. In order to be eligible for that fund, the schools had to make the facility available primarily for recreation. So we will operate it as an outdoor education center nine months of the year. This is written into the contract and is required in order to make it available.

HINKLE: It's on Park and Planning land?

GUSTAFSON: It's on Park and Planning land, so here are three agencies working together, all on the same piece of property. Again, you see how closely three agencies have to work together to really provide the services.

HINKLE: How did that come about? Whose idea was that...

GUSTAFSON: The public schools had requested money in their budget from the County Council for such a facility, and the County Council did not approve it.

HINKLE: When was this?

GUSTAFSON: Three or four years ago. They recommended that there be a study made to explore all possibilities for a grant in order to provide this facility. They recognized the worth of the project, but felt that the cost was excessive at that time. So really, it was initiated by the County Council, who then directed the schools and the Department of Recreation and the Planning Commission to work together. The Planning Commission uncovered the source of funds,

and our three agencies have worked together on the planning. I don't know what the time table of that project is. It might be a year from now--it might be two years from now--but it's in the foreseeable future. This facility then, would supplement the one at Seneca Creek Camp. Swimming facilities would not be available to Lake Bernard Frank, but it's in close enough proximity so that children could be transported daily from that location down to the Glenmont pool, so they could get their swimming in that fashion.

HINKLE: Can they have boating in that area?

GUSTAFSON: I'm not sure if boating will be included on that lake or not at this time. It is at Needwood, but not Lake Bernard Frank. There certainly will be fishing. It will be nature-oriented. There is a nature center there already, or nearing completion there right now.

HINKLE: Will there be a naturalist there?

GUSTAFSON: There will be a naturalist there, yes, and the outdoor education center, of course, will have its own naturalist, aided by the Park and Planning Commission's naturalist, to give the students the best possible nature and science background.

HINKLE: Do the children have to be from around that area?

GUSTAFSON: No, this is for the entire county.

HINKLE: Will they have to be bused?

GUSTAFSON: They'll be bused in. For the outdoor education center, the schools already have rented space in various places around, mostly outside of the county. Now they take students from a school or groups of schools and group them together, and they'll transport them from there. And that will be resident camping, when that takes place.

HINKLE: I understand that one of the reasons they haven't been able to take care of all of the schools who want to take advantage of the program is because of lack of facilities.

GUSTAFSON: They have lacked the facilities and this is a step that is hoped will...

HINKLE: They'll be taken care of in the county instead of going out?

GUSTAFSON: This is true, and in the long run I think it's more economical and desirable. I'm not sure that this is going to solve the whole problem all at once, however.

HINKLE: You'll never be able to take advantage of all who want to, I guess.

GUSTAFSON: There's one other point that I would like to talk about, if I may, and that is the concept of the community school. The community school concept has become somewhat controversial during this past year, because of some misunderstandings.

HINKLE: What is the community school concept?

GUSTAFSON: The community school concept, as outlined by Dr. Elseroad, provides for a school person to be a school community coordinator who would coordinate services around a junior high school center and its feeder elementary schools, encouraging other agencies such as recreation, social services, health, and any other appropriate agency, to bring services in and to serve those people, and to provide a community use of the school building on a more comprehensive basis.

HINKLE: Is this what Tom Poor is doing?

GUSTAFSON: This will be certainly part of that school, yes. We're working hand in hand with him on that very concept. Now the controversial aspect of this, and I feel it is important to point this out, because people have felt that as a Department of Recreation, we have been opposed to the community school. We are not opposed to the community school. We believe in the community use of schools. There has been an extensive use throughout the years, and there should be more extensive use. We believe wholeheartedly in it. We believe, however, that the recreational aspects of the community school should be provided as Dr. Elseroad has stated on a number of occasions and in writing to the County Council a year ago, when there was a discussion of this matter, that the Department of Recreation should be the public agency to provide the recreation service within it. There have been individuals connected with this community school in some locations who have devoted

large portions of their time to recreation when they should have devoted their time to the coordination of recreation with all the other many needed school and community services. And it is because they have drifted off into the field of recreation that there have been some serious misunderstandings and some duplications of services and some actual, in a sense, policy-making functions being performed by the schools in the field of recreation, rather than by the County Department of Recreation. This is what's led to the misunderstanding. We believe in the community school, but we believe that as the public agency charged with the recreation responsibility in the county that we should provide that service entirely and that the county government should establish recreation policies in the schools. Now we're not talking about daytime policies. We're talking only about leisure-time policies--after school hours, evenings and weekends, and during the summer months. So this is where the misunderstanding has arisen, and we are working with the school people, and believe that the Board of Education's policy is very sound in this respect, but regret that there have been some differences in this one matter of who should provide the recreation services.

HINKLE: Isn't this in the Code of Maryland or somewhere? Isn't it spelled out already?

GUSTAFSON: No, I don't think it is. There is nothing legal that says they shouldn't do it. There has been the understanding that the County Department of Recreation would provide the recreation services, but there's nothing legal that requires it. The schools in areas where there is no public recreation department do provide recreation services in many cases. They run summer programs, in some cases utilizing teachers. They set up special budgets for it. But the county has come a long way over the years. Many changes have come about.

My own feeling is that there is a very urgent need for a neutral agency of some type. I'm speaking of a research agency, to come in and make a study of the needs for recreation services in the county. It should be a study of what is being done, what should be done, and what the relationships should be between the various



agencies, particularly the three public agencies here in the county--the Park and Planning Commission, the public schools, and the County Department of Recreation.

There's one other aspect of this whole matter that I think is quite important. The Recreation Board has raised this question. And this is not the first time it has been raised. It was raised in the PAS report. And that is the question of the relationship between Parks and Recreation. Shouldn't they be in a single agency as a Department of Parks and Recreation? Or possibly as a separate commission providing parks and recreation services? The MNCPPC took over the recreation function from Prince George's County a year ago and has consolidated it with their own Parks Department in that county. We have two separate agencies here in this county--we, the program agency; and the Park and Planning Commission, the facility agency. There should be a very thorough study of this relationship and whether or not the two should be together. There will be greater efficiency. There will be better service, and less duplication, and it will resolve many interagency misunderstandings that sometimes develop. In spite of this, however, I think that the Park Department of the Commission has done an excellent job over the years in developing a park system. I think that we, as a Department of Recreation, have made a tremendous amount of progress in providing the recreation services.

HINKLE: Oh, you have, absolutely. I think you can retire with great satisfaction.

GUSTAFSON: Well, I feel that we've come a long, long way since I came on, I think, May 27, 1952.

HINKLE: Do you have a successor?

GUSTAFSON: We have just employed the deputy Director of the Department of Recreation. That position has been needed badly for two or three years.

HINKLE: You haven't had a deputy? Nineteen years without an assistant?

GUSTAFSON: We've had a program chief and two divisional chiefs.

HINKLE: What is this Recreation Board that you mentioned?

GUSTAFSON: It's an advisory board, advisory to the Director, to the County Executive, and to the County Council. The Board was created by resolution

and consists of 11 members, who are appointed for staggered 3-year terms and serve without compensation. Their primary function is to review the recreation services, programs and facilities and make recommendations to the three I've just mentioned, for implementation of these recommendations, of approving the service, or modifying or whatever might be needed.

HINKLE: Do you think that they could comprise this research...

GUSTAFSON: No, they don't feel they can, either. I think that it must be, it should be, a neutral research authority heading it up, with not my ideas, not the Park and Planning Commission's ideas, not the Board of Education's ideas -- but somebody that can come in and look at the relationships between agencies and determine the best direction in which to go. Obviously, I have my views and the Commission has its, and the Board has its (ideas). They are not identical, and a neutral authority, professional people, must come in and make this study. They must not make it, however, without talking to people, without having public hearings, without involving citizens groups. I think that the Recreation Board can be extremely helpful as a sounding board in connection with the study, but not have the primary responsibility for it.

HINKLE: Do you think it's likely to happen?

GUSTAFSON: I think that the chances are better now than ever before. I have made this recommendation to the County Executive. I've made it to the County Council. They've looked upon it favorably, but did not act on it. The Recreation Board is now actually preparing to make a specific proposal to the Executive and to the Council to achieve this. I hope something will result from it.

HINKLE: Why did the Commission take over the Prince George's Department of Recreation? Did the Department of Recreation ask for it, or did the Commission just...

GUSTAFSON: I think that the county government in Prince George's felt that this had some merit. The Delegates to Annapolis from Prince George's County felt it had some merit, and the Park and Planning Commission believed

it would be a good thing, so they went ahead. The County Executive now is asking to have it returned to the county government.

HINKLE: That sounds messy.

GUSTAFSON: There is definitely a difference there, as you, I'm sure, are well aware.

HINKLE: In Montgomery County, you get your budget from the County Council?

GUSTAFSON: It's appropriated as a special tax levy from the Recreation District by the County Council each year.

HINKLE: Based on?

GUSTAFSON: Last year it was  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  per \$100 of the assessed evaluation. The County Executive recommended a  $4\frac{1}{2}\%$  rate for this year, and the County Council approved that increase of  $1\%$ , and we're operating on a  $4\frac{1}{2}\%$  tax rate this year. I'm in no position to know where that will go next year. We're in the very early stages of preparing the budget.

HINKLE: You can't plan until you have the budget, then?

GUSTAFSON: We have the '71-72 budget in effect. That's a budget of \$2,400,000. We're in the process of preparing a budget for 1972-73. This will be presented to the County Executive within the month, and will be presented by the County Executive to the County Council by February 15th, and acted upon by the County Council by May 1st of 1972. There'll of course be budget hearings in the interim period between February 15th and May 1st.

HINKLE: There's one question I should ask for the League of Women Voters, and that is, the League was very much interested in the park/school concept going back to the '50's. Can you tell me...

GUSTAFSON: The park/school concept in the '50's had to do primarily with the relationship between the Park and Planning Commission and the Board of Education, whereby the Park and Planning Commission would actually acquire some acreage adjacent to a school and add to the school size. The agreement that's been followed the last few years has been that the Board would pick up a minimum of nine

acres and the Park and Planning Commission a minimum of nine acres, to make an 18-acre park/school site. This has been applied in a large number of elementary school locations. This did not involve indoor facilities to an extent until just two or three years ago when the Park and Planning Commission built a gymnasium on school property at the Broadacres Elementary School to show the need for a gym at elementary schools. We staff that facility. The Commission built it and maintains it. It's attached to the school. A second one was built at Beverly Farms the following year. A third one is going to be built at the so-called Woodside Park location adjacent to the Woodside elementary school. It's in the planning stage now. It will be realized this coming year. The Board of Education now has gone ahead and adopted a policy of building gymnasiums adjacent to and in connection with schools, recognizing this fundamental need. And they have three, I think, in construction or in planning stages at least this year---one at Veirs Mill Elementary, one at New Hampshire Estates Elementary, and one at Germantown. So there's been quite a bit of progress; and this started with the park/school concept that originally involved only land, and now is involving buildings, and we're staffing the buildings.

HINKLE: Is it necessary that there be 18 acres?

GUSTAFSON: We think that it's a good figure, and if you see the inner cities nowadays, you know it would have been nice if they thought along these lines in those days. They have sites of 2, 3, 4 acres, and they're totally inadequate. Montgomery County is in much better shape, and believe me, it's good to be in better shape. Eighteen acres is not too much! When we have analyzed the athletic needs, we've come to the conclusion that right now we can't begin to meet the needs for athletic programs and demands for outdoor play space around the county at all. In the budget last year, Mr. Gleason recommended that there be a study made of these athletic fields to see if something could be done to bring the Board of Education fields up to standards because they were too small, or too inadequate,

or not adequately developed for maximum use. Their development up to that point had been for school use. The need is to include community use and recreational use. So Mr. Gleason asked that I chair a committee to include representation from the Board of Education staff, from the Park and Planning Commission staff, from the county government, and to come up with a report. And our report showed that more development was needed on many, many of the elementary schools now, and our committee recommended that all elementary schools be 18 acres minimum in the future.

HINKLE: So they could have a 9 and 9 ratio.

GUSTAFSON: That's what we have suggested, and that it not be limited to elementary schools--that it actually include also junior and senior high schools.

The need for outdoor play space is just unbelievable!

HINKLE: If only they had done that when they first built the schools!

GUSTAFSON: It would have been wonderful. It costs between \$150- to \$200,000 to build this added facility today, and that's only a minimum facility when it is built. Many of our people feel the gymnasiums that are being built are too small--roughly 50 by 75 feet--in size. It is absolutely minimum. But it will make a contribution. It will provide better physical education classes during the daytime, and community use after hours.

HINKLE: These multi-purpose rooms are really very small-purpose rooms.

GUSTAFSON: The multi-purpose room is not usable for athletics. It hasn't been designed for them. It hasn't been designed for all-purpose use, including athletics. Many other purposes, yes. Of course, it's used for auditorium purposes and for general meeting purposes of various types.

HINKLE: Are there any areas that you wish that had you had the funds you would have liked to have been able to make recreation plans?

GUSTAFSON: Couldn't begin to name them. There are so many. These things cost money. We need facilities all over this county. I would like to see every elementary school have an elementary school gymnasium. I would like to see auditoriums in all the schools. They're beginning to in some of the secondary

schools now. We've got a long way to go. We only have two swimming pools for public purposes. That doesn't meet the needs of Montgomery County. Even with the community pools and the country club pools, we need at least five big pools carefully spaced around the county, and maybe another four indoor pools spaced around the county for year-around service. Our recreation centers are one-room buildings except the three I've named--Wheaton, Bethesda, and Long Branch. A one-room building isn't a recreation center in the true sense of the word. It's too small to staff. Children need service after school. The schools are not adequate to provide the facilities for after-school use on a year-around continuing basis.

The needs are tremendous. We don't have a cultural center. I've been on a study committee for 15 years. Three different committees studying the cultural needs of the county, and each committee has come up with a report, and the latest one proposed, I believe, about a \$3,000,000 auditorium seating maybe 1,200 people, with a good stage and adequate adjacent facilities. They proposed that there ought to be a cultural center and civic auditorium center type of facility like Rockville has, scattered throughout the county, in many different locations. These are unmet needs. They cost money. The taxpayer resources are not unlimited, so we have to be patient, but we should not forget the needs in our long-term planning. We haven't begun to meet the needs.

HINKLE: Do you think you've met the crucial needs? Most of the crucial needs...

GUSTAFSON: You remember the first year's budget was \$285,000. This year's is \$2,410,000 -- but we're a long way from meeting the demands that we get today.

HINKLE: What about the poor?

GUSTAFSON: Well, we're concentrating on some low-income areas. The TESS Commission area, for instance, is being given special help. We've given special help in Sandy Spring at the recommendation of the County Council. We have waived fees for poor children so they can get into programs and things of that sort. I

think we're meeting the more important needs, but I certainly don't think we're meeting all the basic needs. It costs money to do these things--lots of money. If we were to have just a teen center, as proposed by the Recreation Board recently, in every senior high school, where young people could gather and congregate after school hours, evenings and weekends in each of the senior high schools - just 22 schools, with one leader on duty plus the money for part-time assistant leaders - it would cost \$350,000 for just that one project. If we did the same thing for the junior high schools, we would be talking about a \$450,000 to \$500,000 project in addition.

HINKLE: I look upon that as preventive.

GUSTAFSON: It is preventive, very much so.

HINKLE: It costs society so much more than \$350,000...

GUSTAFSON: You're absolutely right, but can we publicly convince people to take the kind of tax increase that this would require to meet...

HINKLE: It's only an intermediate time that this costs more money...

GUSTAFSON: This is right, but isn't this the history of government? It's a discouraging history of government. It's most depressing. But it is a fact. We've increased nearly ten times. We've added from the three basic programs which were provided when we took over. We have at least 10 or 12 what we call basic program services now. We've expanded the scope, the type, the quantity and the quality. We're a long way from meeting the recreational needs, and you're absolutely right--it's preventive in character. It prevents many problems of young people. It's not a cure-all for delinquency. It's not a cure-all for the drug problem, but it certainly would help. And this is one reason, I think, why the Recreation Department budget passed last year, because it was recognized by the County Executive and the County Council that we had to expand faster than we could under the  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  tax rate. Now we're going to ask for more money next year. Let's hope we get another good increase and continue to move forward. But these increases

aren't just going to happen overnight, for the simple reason that the public is not really ready to get behind and demand that their tax rate be increased, and make the request for an increase so vocal that the county officials that have to approve this are willing to go ahead and double or triple these programs.

HINKLE: Would it help if, - these hearings are open to the public - when they're open to the public, would it help to have organizations testify?

GUSTAFSON: Certainly. Every year some do. Of course, the Recreation Board always speaks to the Recreation Department budget. The Health and Welfare Council always speaks to the recreation budget, and various citizens associations from time to time, but that's not enough.

HINKLE: The unfortunate thing is that the teenagers who really need it don't have a voice for them.

GUSTAFSON: It's been proposed that there be some teenagers on the Recreation Board, and the Recreation Board itself is encouraging this.

HINKLE: Even if there were a band of student councils, but there isn't.

GUSTAFSON: There is a Student Council Government. Mr. Gleason has pushed for the creation of a Youth Services Commission, and this is in existence now. Dealing with youth plans, it's a group of some 30 or 40 young people who meet regularly to discuss various aspects of youth needs in the county, and a man from the Department of Recreation has been assigned as counselor to this group.

HINKLE: Who are they? Are they reflective of the county?

GUSTAFSON: They're from all over the county. Whether they're representative or not, I don't know. Sometimes I think that when you pick someone from the student councils and from the top youth leadership groups, they don't really know the needs of many young people. They're busy. Their needs are met. The needs of these other young people aren't. So I've often felt that the needs of the average kid are often not recognized. For instance, the kids keep talking about the mechanical interest--the drag strip. There's a drag strip up in Frederick



County, not far over the line, but we have proposed this year the construction of a mechanical hobby shop which would give youth an opportunity to tinker and work and repair their own cars. It's in the budget planning this year and construction next year.

HINKLE:           Where?

GUSTAFSON:       We've talked about a number of locations. They haven't picked one for certain. The general area of Rockville is one that has been considered. It's central, you see. This is branching out into a new field, and this is in the budget. We got it approved last year.

OUTLINE FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: Forest Gustafson  
Director, Recreation Department  
Montgomery County, Md.

INTERVIEWER: Maureen K. Hinkle

DATE: October 12, 1971, 1:30 p.m.

OBJECTIVE: To collect for the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County Oral History Project the taped words and verbatim transcripts of individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of Montgomery County.

SUBJECT: Public Recreation Programs in Montgomery County

- I. MNCPPC first recreational programs
  - A. Character of the County
  - B. Early recreation programs
- II. Creation of Montgomery County Department of Recreation
  - A. Reasons for separate Department
  - B. Relationship with other agencies
    1. MNCPPC
    2. Board of Education
    3. County Council
  - C. Exceptions
    1. Rockville
    2. Gaithersburg
    3. Washington Grove
    4. Others.
- III. Growth of County and corresponding expansion of recreation programs
  - A. How have the many and various recreation needs of the county residents been met?
    1. Who determines policies and type of and location of programs?
    2. Problems
  - B. Park/school concept. Origins. Delineation of ownership between MNCPPC and Board of Education
- IV. Future
  - A. Recommendations
  - B. Personal reflections

# Rec Head Is Retiring, But He Still Has Kick

By George Spangler  
Sentinel Reporter

"I think people should get out of it when they still have some life left--some kick in them," says retiring county Recreation Director, Forest V. Gustafson.

A daily jogger, seasonal gardener, hiker, square dance caller, Gustafson is anxious to retire from the \$29,115 a year post so that he can do more practicing than preaching. He retires June 1.

Gustafson, 61, organized the county's leisure activities program in 1953, led creation of the boys baseball league, and public swimming facilities. He is credited generally with the tenfold financial expansion of the public recreation program here in the last 20 years.

#### Stumbled Into Government

A slight man, still trim, he, like many other public workers, stumbled into government service during the lean Depression years.

Equipped with a degree in physical education from the University of Minnesota in 1933 and a background as an Eagle Scout, Gustafson was recruited to train recreation leaders by the Works Progress Administration. "I told them 'I don't know anything about recreation.' They said 'Your professor thinks you do.'"

Six months after starting the WPA job he was promoted to recreation supervisor for southern Minnesota.

Then came a five-year stint in the Navy (more recreation jobs, first in Panama Canal zone, then at Charleston Naval Hospital, S.C.) and three years as recreation director in Belleville, Ill., he landed the top recreation post in Detroit.

Three years later, ("There was a degree of frustration.") he started reading the want ads and professional announcements and heard about Montgomery County.

#### 'Going Places'

"I said to myself now there was a place that looks like its going places. It has exceeded my fondest dreams in the opportunity it has offered," said Gustafson.

In June, 1952, when Gustafson arrived here, whatever recreational programs were available (mainly 41 parks) were run by the Maryland National Capitol Park and Planning Commission. Soon, however, his reorganization--with a \$250,000 budget--took over the MNCPPC system and the now enormous recreation program was flying.

He says in his youth people sought

out their own recreation, but then came growth.

#### More Services

"I think we're providing more services now. People are demanding more because it's a way of life. Recreation is a vehicle to release our frustrations, it is an essential part of our lives," Gustafson says. It is the difference between places like Columbia and that other new development, Montgomery Village, and the unplanned communities. What do they have? Open spaces and opportunities.

"People have to have these outlets because I don't believe they are going to get it in their work, to the extent that they need it..."

"Sometimes I get discouraged that people are not always concerned with the proper care of themselves. For that reason some might call me a character. I jog five days a week, about a mile or a mile and a half each day. During the summer I swim. I don't mean just splashing in and out, I mean back and forth many times for exercise," he says.



Forest V. Gustafson--Retiring

"People tend to take the easy life more than they should. Very few people develop a systematic plan for fitness."

#### Active Family

His family is also hardy. Daughter Nancy Lipscomb and her husband are field recreation workers in Prince George's County, and daughter Susan Johnson and her husband are Peace Corps workers now stationed in Liberia. Their mother, Louise, teaches folk dancing.

Until a year ago the Gustafsons square danced regularly. Both have been callers active in county country dancing.

"I won't sit in a rocking chair and twiddle my thumbs...and if you're wondering, I will be calling and dancing again, when I find some time. I don't feel I'm too old to dance."

He said he hopes the county puts its school facilities to further recreational use, builds gymnasiums onto more of the grade schools and provides additional community recreation centers.