

# Park Happenings

## Women and the Waukegan Park District

By Ty Rohrer, Museum Supervisor

Women have been a guiding force of the Waukegan Park District well before the organization was formed in 1916. The actions taken by women insured that the Waukegan Park District would be successful and that some of the most beautiful areas in Waukegan would one day become parks.

In the early 1900s, it was realized that a park district was needed to ensure that beautiful lands would be reserved as parks for future generations to enjoy. The first attempts at organizing a park district in Waukegan failed as the people of Waukegan voted down the referendum.

Undeterred, the Waukegan Women's Club, along with other civic leaders and entities continued to push for a park district. Around 1910, the Women's Club, under the guidance of their president, Mrs. Marian Upton, decided to hire renowned Chicago architect, Dwight K. Perkins to formalize an extensive park plan for Waukegan to be incorporated once the park district formed.

Up to this point in time, women had a strong voice in making changes and improvements in Waukegan, but they could not show their influence at the polls. This all changed in 1913 when women in Illinois received the right to vote.

The enfranchisement of women had a big impact on Waukegan. After 1913, it was realized that items voted down in the past such as local prohibition of alcohol and the creation of a park district could become a reality if brought to the polls again.

On December 26, 1916, for the first time, women now had the opportunity to vote "yes" to the Waukegan Park District. Finally, after many years pushing for the park district, the vote passed overwhelmingly at a number of approximately four to one. Of the 459 votes cast for the forming of the district, over half were made by women.

Some of the earliest actions of the Park District were to acquire the lands outlined in the Perkins

Plan that had been commissioned by the Waukegan Women's Club. Today, we can visit beautiful Roosevelt and Washington Parks thanks to the foresight and vision of women in Waukegan.

In large part, we have Waukegan women of the early twentieth century to thank for much of what the park district is today.

In the Waukegan Park District's 100 years, women have been a big part of the organization. We would like to highlight women and organizations who have had a more recent impact on the Waukegan Park District. By no means is this an exhaustive list; we are sorry that we can not recognize everyone.

**Joan Pfau Callahan** supported Waukegan in numerous ways and she guided the Park District for 18 years as a commissioner. She helped to save Bowen Park from residential development and the Callahan Family Foundation continues to support the district. Joan's daughter, Charlotte Wozniak, continues her mother's legacy of leadership as a member of the Waukegan Park Board Foundation.

**Faith Clark**, a former teacher in Waukegan Public Schools, introduced hundreds of children to *Dandelion Wine* and Ray Bradbury. She has been a great friend of the Jack Benny Center for the Arts and a persistent advocate for the Bowen Park Theatre Company as well as other theaters including the Waukegan Community Players.

**Ann Darrow** helped start the Park District's Oakwood Cemetery Walk and she has been a part of the event for over twenty years. She has focused much of her time and research on piecing together the history of the city's cemetery, Oakwood, to help share the stories that are found there.

**Patricia Foley** is a proud member of the Waukegan Concert Chorus and has served on the Park Board since 2007. Before being elected to board she was an avid volunteer for the Waukegan Symphony Orchestra and Concert Chorus. As a Commissioner, she has been instrumental in the development of the



Waukegan SportsPark and the Indoor Aquatics Center.

**Claudia Freeman** grew up in the parks, started her career as a summer day camp counselor with the Park District and today is the Superintendent of Cultural Arts. She has a national presence as an arts advocate and has developed nationally recognized arts programs.

**Madeline Fuqua** impact in Waukegan is long lasting. She started the League of Women's Voters, was president of the YWCA, and was co-chair of the Lake County Committee for the Equal Rights Amendment. She was a strong supporter of the Park District and was named Patron of the Year in 1997. The gazebo in the Bowen Formal Garden was donated by her.

**Sara Griffin** has served on numerous commissions and committees and has lobbied on behalf of the Park District to enhance and develop recreational facilities. She has also worked closely with the Park District to form a partnership with the Waukegan Historical Society to ensure that the city's history is preserved for future generations.

**Ann Hughes Johnson** taught countless people how to swim for the Park District. She was also an original member of the Waukegan Concert Chorus and she established a memorial fund to help provide for the arts for future generations.

**Jan Keller** has taught dance and movement with the Park District for over 30 years instructing countless adults and children.

**Janet Kilkelly** was an active volunteer before her election as a Waukegan Park Board Commissioner. She is in her 14th year as a Commissioner and as such has been an untiring advocate for new world class facilities and parks; a few highlights include Bowen Park's renovation, the Field House Sports and Fitness Center, Waukegan SportsPark and the new aquatics center. She currently serves as the Board liaison to the Waukegan Parks Foundation.

**Beverly Millard** has served as the volunteer librarian for the Waukegan Historical Society for over 25 years. She is a strong supporter of the Cultural Arts Division and she has spent countless hours preserving Waukegan's history and making it accessible to the community. Beverly received the first Illinois Park and Recreation Association Volunteer of the Year Award.

**Jean Mulligan** first started teaching music for the Jane Addams Hull House at the Bowen Country Club before she spent 35 years giving piano lessons at the Jack Benny Center for the Arts.

**Bertha Ogrin** served on numerous Park District and City committees. She was a long-time official on both the Park District and County Boards. Bertha helped found the North Illinois Women's Golf Association and she and her family helped to provide opportunities for children to learn how to play golf. She and her family donated land to establish the Lake County YMCA.

**Cheryl Graham Ptasienski** was a long-time volunteer and supporter of the Park District who fought hard for the 1997 "Save Our Parks" referendum.

**Corrine Rose** started as a volunteer and after being hired part-time, she rose through the ranks and was at one time the Superintendent of Finance. She also became the district's first female Executive Director. After retirement, she continued to serve the district as a commissioner for over ten years.

**Jean "Susie" Schreiber** is an environmental advocate and is the chair of the Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group. Under her leadership, over \$1 million has been secured to restore the ravine in Bowen Park.

**Della Steele** is a devoted supporter and volunteer for the Park District serving on many committees. She has helped guide the district in providing programs and services to the residents of the south side of Waukegan. She was named "Volunteer of the Year" in 2015.

**Mary Ellen Vanderverter** played a key role in the successful passage of the 1997 "Save Our Parks" referendum.

**The Waukegan Garden Club** from its inception in 1929 advocated for beautiful ravines and gardens in the district's parks. In recent years, members from the organization can be found planting and maintaining beautiful flower beds in the Formal Garden in Bowen Park.

**The Waukegan Women's Club** not only helped create the Park District, but since its inception has continued to be one of its strongest backers. Over the years, the Women's Club has helped raise funds for playgrounds and gardens, volunteered to help during events, and they have always answered the district's call for help.

## New Aquatics Center to Open

Construction of the new aquatic center at the Field House Sports and Fitness Center in Hinkston Park is on budget and on schedule, opening sometime in October. The aquatic center is the only public indoor pool in Waukegan and will benefit the community by offering low impact fitness classes in the water, year round swimming lessons, fitness and recreational swimming, and facilities for high school and club swim competitions. The aquatics center will be open during Field House regular hours and available for lap swimming. Family/open swim will be available during most evenings and weekends. There is a separate children's pool and water play area.

The warm water therapy pool with a current and jets will be available for member use and additional rental rooms for private birthday parties were included in the project. In partnering with Vista Health System, patients will be able to use the warm water therapy pool for rehabilitation and restoration under the supervision of an onsite physical therapist.

Waukegan School District #60 partnered with the Waukegan Park District, financially supporting the pool and the high school swim



team will hold its competitions at the new aquatic center.

A public grand opening will be announced in early fall; watch the Waukegan Park District weekly newsletter, Facebook and the newspaper for the actual date and time.

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## Learn to SwimSmart

North Shore Gas is the lead sponsor for the Waukegan Park District's new Water Safety Campaign, Learn to SwimSmart. The utility which provides natural gas to customers in the North Shore and surrounding communities recently awarded an \$8,000 grant to the Waukegan Park District to support the two year initiative beginning fall 2016.

The grant's purpose is to introduce children who have never taken a swim lesson to become comfortable in the water. Water safety, swimming fundamentals, pool rules and etiquette will be covered in a Learn to SwimSmart classes that begin in November, see page 27. The North Shore Gas grant will enable 720 children, ages 4-8, to participate at no charge in the class at new aquatics center located at the Field House, 800 N. Baldwin, Waukegan, IL.

The newly formed Waukegan Parks Foundation has accepted the leadership challenge presented by North Shore Gas and is planning an event and campaign that will expand the Learn to SwimSmart program. The North Shore Gas and the Foundation Board were moved by the alarming national statistics about drownings, the fact that "minority" children drown at a much higher rate than their white counterparts, and the special challenges presented by our population's geographical location on the shores of Lake Michigan and in Lake County, IL where water recreation is favorite summer pastime.



### According to USA Swimming

- Approximately 10 people drown every day in the U.S. (Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)).
- More than one in five fatal drowning victims are children younger than 14 (Source: CDC).
- Participation in formal swimming lessons can reduce the risk of drowning by 88 percent among children aged one to four years. (Source: Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine 2009)
- Seventy percent of African-American and sixty percent of Hispanic/Latino children cannot swim. (Source: National research study by the USA Swimming Foundation and the University of Memphis)
- African-American children drown at a rate nearly three times higher than their Caucasian peers. (Source: CDC)
- If a parent does not know how to swim, there is only a 13 percent chance that a child in that household will learn how to swim. (Source: National research study by the USA Swimming Foundation and the University of Memphis)

The Waukegan Park District extends its sincere thanks to North Shore Gas and the Waukegan Parks Foundation for their financial support of a program that will help keep Waukegan children comfortable and safe in the water.

## Citizen Science: Composting

Composting adds nutrients to the soil and reduces landfill wastes. Compost is beneficial to your garden and will turn organic kitchen waste, grass clippings and fall leaves into nourishment for garden plants. Now is a great time to start composting; the compost will be ready for use during the spring planting season. Follow these easy steps to compost kitchen waste, grass clippings and fall leaves.

1. Gather all grass clippings and green yard waste into a four foot to ten foot pile that is three to five feet high. Size matters. Such a pile ensures air flow and correct temperatures.
2. Mix "green" such as grass clippings and vegetable/kitchen waste with "brown" materials like leaves and shredded paper to add carbon. You need both green and brown, otherwise your pile will compact and start to smell.
3. Use food scraps and yard waste only. Do not add meats or pet droppings to your compost pile.
4. Avoid materials treated with pesticides and/or herbicides.
5. Adding weeds can be tricky. If your compost pile doesn't get hot enough, the seeds will live and spread to your garden when you add the compost to your garden. A compost pile should be steaming hot, not just warm to help breakdown the plant materials into useable compost.
6. Turn your pile monthly in the summer; each time you turn it, you speed up the decomposition process. Move the outer layer to the center. Rotate your pile less often in cool weather because the pile temperature may be disturbed. Do not rotate the leaves if you smell ammonia or another bad odor coming from the pile.
7. Keep your compost pile damp but not wet. When adding material to your pile, make sure that you moisten each layer as it is added. You can test the moisture by squeezing a handful leaves. You should get a few drops of water. If you are not careful, your pile will dry out during the summer, slowing down the composting process. Don't add too much water.
8. Too much material to compost? Make a second or third pile. Stop adding material to a pile that is underway and start a new pile. This will insure you get a chance to use the compost each season.



9. Worms and most bugs are ok.
10. Since the compost process works best at temperature between 120 and 150 degrees composting in the warmer months is easier.
11. Your completed product should yield a pile of compost about half the size of the original pile.
12. The composting process takes between four and nine months to complete. Your colorful fall leaves should now be a dark and crumbly material with an earthy odor. When the season changes to fall once again, use your compost as winter mulch or till it into your garden soil ready for spring planting. It is okay to wait until spring to add to your garden; just do so before planting.

### Other resources:

- [http://www.howtocompost.org/info/info\\_fall\\_leaves.asp](http://www.howtocompost.org/info/info_fall_leaves.asp)
- [http://eartheasy.com/grow\\_compost.html](http://eartheasy.com/grow_compost.html)
- <http://www.homecompostingmadeeasy.com/foodscraps.html>
- <http://www.professorhouse.com/your-home/gardening-plants/general-plants/articles/what-do-worms-eat/whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/Redwormsedit.htm>
- <http://www.redwormcomposting.com/getting-started/>
- <http://www.planetnatural.com/worm-composting/>



## 100th Birthday Celebration

Come help us celebrate as the Waukegan Park District turns 100 years old on Monday, December 26th. The Board of Commissioners invites you to join them at the Belvidere Recreation Center for an open house that begins at 4:30pm. Learn about the park district's early days and accomplishments through the decades, sip hot chocolate and warm yourself at the bonfire. Then enjoy the fireworks at 5:30 pm in Belvidere Park brought to you by the Board of Commissioners and the Waukegan Parks Foundation Board.