

1981
Annual Report
Of the
BERGEN COUNTY PARK COMMISSION
Paramus, New Jersey

BERGEN COUNTY PARK COMMISSION, 1981

Paramus, New Jersey

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ALL PARKS SURVIVE A SQUEAKER YEAR;
THEY'RE MOST NEEDED DURING HARD TIMES

The Park Commission found 1981 challenging, to say the least. Budget limitations squeezed from one side and inflation from the other. There were times when the pinch was so tight that we thought we might have to close some facilities or do without swimming and/or skiing.

With cooperation from the Board of Freeholders and the Park Commission staff, we managed to keep everything open and operating--if not always up to the standards we would have wished to maintain. To manage we had to make personnel cutbacks, to reduce some operating hours, to put Saddle Ridge on concession operation, to end professional tennis services at Van Saun Park, to forgo such traditions as a printed annual report and a tennis tournament, and to get some eleventh-hour financial reinforcement.

On the plus side, we are happy to report virtual completion of Wildlife Center renovation, opening of the upper nine holes at Darlington Golf Course, steps toward development of a 1 3/4-mile extension of Saddle River Park's North Trail for bicyclists and pedestrians, and preparation of plans for zoo improvement and for adaptation of all public comfort stations for use by the handicapped. These features involve capital funds obtained through bond issue.

The Park Commission will continue its all-out effort to keep our popular park facilities available to the public and to make needed renovations and improvements.

During a recession the county parks are especially important to Bergen families, offering pleasant and convenient escape from hardship and worries. There is opportunity for plenty of free fun; few of the facilities charge fees.

JOHN BOMBACE
Bergen County Park Commission President

WILDLIFE CENTER EXHIBIT HALL IS NOW BARRIER FREE;

DARLINGTON GOLF COURSE GAINS NINE HOLES

Renovation and expansion of the Wildlife Center exhibit hall and opening of the upper nine holes at Darlington Golf Course were 1981 highlights for the Bergen County park system.

A NEW LOBBY AND CLASSROOM AT THE WILDLIFE CENTER HALL

The Wildlife Center exhibit hall is now barrier free, thanks to the new ground-level entrance and the rest-room reconstruction. There is a reception desk in the new lobby, and two 600-gallon aquarium shells were installed. Plans and specifications for aquarium completion were prepared late in the year. One of the aquariums will contain fresh-water fish, the other salt-water species.

In addition to the lobby, the building has gained a classroom, two rooms where naturalists can prepare exhibits, an office, a dark room, and a storage room. One of the exhibit-preparation rooms is on an upper level, above the classroom and office. The storage room was added beside the observatory.

New energy-efficient heating was installed for the whole building.

ALL 18 DARLINGTON GOLF COURSE HOLES ARE IN PLAY

With the opening May 12 of the upper nine holes, Darlington Golf Course had all 18 holes in play. Construction of the new holes was completed in October of 1980, but opening was postponed because the prolonged drought adversely affected grass growth and it was felt the new seedlings were not yet ready to withstand play.

All of the new fairways are tree-lined and hilly and well trapped, making it important for golfers to place their shots on the fairway. There is a panoramic view of the Ramapo Mountains from hole number 2.

With opening of the new nine, golf car and car rental became available at the course. Construction of golf shelters, sand traps, and the sewer pumping station was completed in 1981.

REVENUE OFFSETS 31 PER CENT OF BUDGET FUNDS

The Park Commission turned over to the County Treasurer revenue totaling \$1,956,746, which constituted a return of 30.85 per cent of the \$6,343,000 in operating funds allocated to the Park Commission by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Twenty-seven-hole Rockleigh Golf Course topped the revenue list with \$473,475. Other totals were: Overpeck Golf Course, \$291,448; Darlington Park (swimming season), \$272,129; Darlington Golf Course, \$270,112; Campgaw Mountain Ski Center, \$122,331; Overpeck Riding Center, \$116,812; Orchard Hills Golf Course, \$112,772; Park Commission registration and park-use permits, \$107,271; miscellaneous (such as concession and vending machine returns), \$89,136; miniature railroad in Van Saun Park, \$68,279; Saddle Ridge Horseback Riding Area (which went to concession July 1), \$19,548; pony rides at Van Saun Park, \$12,535; and sale of tennis balls at Van Saun Park, \$898.

TRAIL, ZOO, REST-ROOM PROJECTS UNDER WAY

Major Park Commission projects under way as the year ended included development of a 1 3/4-mile extension of Saddle River County Park's North trail for bicyclists and pedestrians, expansion and renovation of zoo facilities at Van Saun Park, and renovation of 33 public comfort stations in the parks to make them barrier free for handicapped visitors.

Engineering plans and cross-section plans for the bicycle-trail extension were prepared for the State Department of Transportation. A consulting engineer began work on plans and specifications for a trail bridge spanning the Ho-Ho-Kus Brook at the start of the extension and on plans for relocation of the Saddle River along the proposed trail route.

LAND IS SOUGHT FOR TRAIL EXTENSION

In connection with the trail project, the Park Commission and the Village of Ridgewood made preliminary arrangements for the exchange of 7.6 acres of land--giving the Park Commission access to Grove Street and providing Ridgewood with protection for the Village water system. Landscape plans were prepared by the Park Commission and transmitted to the Village of Ridgewood to facilitate the land transfer.

ACCESS TO UNDERPASS IS NEEDED FOR TRAIL

The Park Commission worked on getting appraisals in preparation for an exchange of property with two private corporations so that the Commission can have bicycle access to the East Ridgewood Avenue underpass near Saddle River Park's Wild Duck Pond Area at the north end of the proposed trail extension.

The Commission participated in a May 7 public forum on the proposed extension, which would enable bicyclists and pedestrians to get from Fair Lawn to Ridgewood on a safe 4 3/4-mile trail through linear streamside Saddle River Park.

ANIMAL-CARE BUILDING IS DESIGNED

Plans and specifications for a new animal-care building in Van Saun Park went out for bid late in the year. The building will be utilized as winter quarters for new arrivals and other animals needing special attention.

The zoo barn, which had been serving as winter quarters, will be renovated to provide an animal infirmary and a headquarters for the zoo staff.

Work began on plans for reconstruction of the aviary, which had deteriorated so badly that it had to be closed.

BARRIER-FREE FACILITIES FOR VISITORS IN WHEEL CHAIRS

Plans were drawn to make every public comfort station in the park system barrier free. Two-hundred picnic tables designed for use with wheel chairs were placed in various parks.

The Bergen County archery field-course range was deeded to the Park Commission, and the Commission set up a system for issuing use permits.

THERE WERE 1,208 NATURE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Wildlife Center naturalists scheduled 865 programs in 1981, and the Van Saun Park zoo scheduled 343 educational programs.

Public programs accounted for 135 of the 865 programs scheduled by Wildlife Center naturalists at the Wildlife Center and at Campgaw Mountain and Ramapo Valley Reservations. Many of the public programs had guest speakers or guest hike leaders; the rest were conducted by Wildlife Center naturalists. Our naturalists conducted programs specially scheduled by school classes and by organizations. Also they conducted nature workshop classes, prepared exhibits, and arranged film festivals and other special events. Lacking a meeting room, Van Saun Park presented 73 per cent of its programs off the premises, chiefly at schools. There were sheep shearing and spinning and weaving demonstrations at the zoo, and educational material was posted at zoo exhibits.

THE BREEDING PROGRAM IS FLOURISHING

Young were born to zoo ponies, sheep, monkeys, the cow, chickens, goats, cotton-headed tamarins, mouflon, pigs, emus, Fallow and Sika deer, herons, and teals. Surplus stock was sold or traded. A new ostrich exhibit was prepared.

A zookeeper training program was initiated.

SADDLE RIDGE GOES ON CONCESSION OPERATION

Saddle Ridge Horseback Riding Area was taken over July 1 on a concession basis by Bergen County Riding Center Inc. Saddle Ridge, on Campgaw Mountain, had been operated by the Park Commission, but budget and personnel limitations made it advantageous for the Park Commission to turn to concession operation. The resulting savings helped the Park Commission with its effort to maintain park facilities and services in the face of soaring costs. It was necessary to drop 31 employees from the Park Commission pay roll in 1981.

TENNIS SERVICES DISCONTINUED

The need to cut back significantly on personnel outlay led to major changes at Van Saun Park's tennis courts. Professional supervision, lessons, shower use, and the annual tennis tournament were eliminated--representing a considerable saving. This action saddened many tennis center patrons, but the accompanying discontinuance of public playing fees was seen as a benefit by many other players.

THE SWIMMING SEASON WAS A BIT SHORTER

Opening of the swimming season at Darlington Park took place June 13 rather than Memorial Day weekend as in previous years. The later opening produced a saving in personnel expenditure with a minimum of inconvenience to the public. Attendance had always been light between Memorial Day and mid-June.

Budget problems necessitated holiday closings of some park facilities. (Permanent employees who work on a holiday, like those who don't, get a day's pay for the holiday. In addition, those who work receive time and a half pay for hours worked.)

PARKS FEEL THE WATER SHORTAGE

The water shortage was a major problem for the park system in 1981. Restrictions on watering resulted in damage to plantings at all facilities. Greens and fairways could not be maintained properly. It was well into spring before we knew whether or not we would have permission to fill the Darlington Park swimming lakes. We did get the permission.

There was some question about whether there could be snow-making at Campgaw Ski Center. Permission was granted when it was shown that run-off from the slopes drains back to the lake from which the water is drawn.

COMMISSION IS HOST TO SPECIAL EVENTS

Overpeck County Park's Leonia South Area was the scene of the July 12-14 Bergen County 4-H Fair, which attracted thousands of visitors with a variety of shows, demonstrations, and contests and a chicken barbecue. The Office on Aging's senior citizen picnic was held at Van Saun Park September 23.

The Garden State Grand Prix horse show was held at Overpeck Riding Center May 17, featuring 30 of the nation's top jumping riders and horses. The traditional outdoor art show at Van Saun Park took place September 12 under the auspices of the Bergen County Office on Cultural and Historic Affairs in cooperation with the Park Commission.

Center Stage and the Park Commission talked about having Center Stage present weekly family-oriented dramatic productions in the county parks. Initial plans were made, but the project had to be canceled because funds were not available.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS VARY

Among 1981 construction projects were resodding of Breslin Field and new lighting for the field, renovation of the Van Saun Park soccer field, rebuilding of four tees at Rockleigh Course and completion of cart paths at the course, paving of the Leonia North soccer field parking area and improvement of drainage at Leonia North tennis courts, paving work and erection of a concrete retaining wall at Wild Duck Pond, improvement of the railroad track bed at Van Saun Park, erection of a vestibule at the Van Saun Park food-service building, and clearing of the zoo pond drain and installation of new gates to improve zoo pond water flow. Stones were placed along the banks of the brook at Van Saun Park to curtail erosion. A stairway to the Ramapo River was constructed for the convenience of elderly fishermen visiting Ramapo Valley Reservation. Large rocks were strategically placed at Ramapo Reservation to curtail illegal entry after hours.

ALL SORTS OF INSTALLATIONS

Park Commission crews installed a wide variety of facilities in the parks. Among facilities installed in 1981 were security gates, entrance gates, railroad signals, exhaust fans, heaters, toilets, faucets, lights, electrical service, alarm systems, meters, antennae, doors, pumps, thermostats, irrigation lines, timers, rails and posts, floors, and sprinklers.

MAINTAINING A PARK SYSTEM IS A BIG JOB

Maintenance of grounds, buildings, equipment, ball fields, and play courts was a never-ending process involving gardening, painting, repairing, shoring up, litter removal, and drainage work. In addition to the 26 recreation areas, the Park Commission is responsible for maintenance work at the Wortendyke Barn, Garretson Forge Farm, and Merritt Circle. The Commission handles garbage removal for the parks and other county facilities.

Roads were graded and paved, drainage ditches dug, dirt and stone and manure carted, bridges creosoted, stone walls renovated, soil rototilled, debris and brush removed, roofs shingled, plantings put in and tended, snow removed, snow manufactured for the ski slopes, and ice cleared for skating. Care of zoo and Wildlife Center animals and riding horses was a major concern.

Play equipment, benches, bicycle racks, picnic tables, and litter baskets were set in place. Construction workers built benches, equipment boxes, an incubator, cabinets, and an attendant's shelter for use when there is ice skating at Wild Duck Pond.

THEFT AND VANDALISM ARE RAMPANT

Theft was a constant problem. Items stolen included a 10-foot gate, mowers, battery chargers, gas cans, welding outfits, a rowboat and oars, an emergency phone, oxygen tanks, a sprayer, a tennis net, truck jacks, tools and tool boxes, an ignition timing light, golf course pins and flags and tee markers, rose bushes, and fencing. (At Darlington Course 180 feet of cyclone fence were removed, and 56 feet of top-rail fence disappeared at Van Saun Park.)

Vandals damaged railroad signals, a water tower, a chimney, comfort stations, drinking fountains, picnic tables, park benches, park drives, fences, bridges, pumps, score boards, water lines, ski lift locks, alarms, locks, furniture, burners and heaters, electric service, walls, roofs, stairs, motors, cabinets, a backhoe, fans, floors, signs, vehicles, and play equipment. A pipe was wrapped around a tree.