

MRPA Professional Awards The People For Whom They're Named

GERALD B. FITZGERALD

Gerald B. Fitzgerald graduated from Notre Dame University in 1930. He received his master's degree from the University of Minnesota in 1934, and his doctoral studies were completed at Indiana University in 1952. Following three years of teaching in Illinois, he worked for the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. He joined the University of Minnesota faculty in 1946. He served as president of Minnesota Recreation Association and served on regional committees. His publications include 50 articles, 10 pamphlets, and three books, as well as sections of several other books. He was one of the leading thinkers in the nation about parks and recreation. He passed away in 1963.

CLIFTON E. FRENCH

Clifton E. French was born in Minneapolis. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a B.S. in 1948, and received his M.Ed. in recreation leadership in 1949. He was the first director of Coffman Union at the University of Minnesota. He served for seven years as the first director of parks and recreation for the City of Edina. During his tenure, the City built a number of new recreational facilities, including: a golf course, ice hockey arena, football and baseball fields, outdoor pool, and a system of parks. Clifton went on to become the first superintendent of the Hennepin County Park Reserve District. Under his leadership, the District's park holdings grew from 400 to 25,000 acres, attracting two million visitors annually. Clifton retired in 1984. In 1989, he became Minnesota Recreation and Park Association's part-time director, and served in that capacity for five years. He has been a wonderful role model for many parks and recreation professionals in the state of Minnesota, and on the national level.

TOMMY JOHNSON

Tommy Johnson graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1958. He began his career at the Minneapolis Park Board first as a recreation supervisor, then as a district manager. He retired in 1990. Tommy was instrumental in introducing broomball and wrestling to the City of Minneapolis parks. He also worked with the lay community who helped conduct track meeting in various parks. Tommy also helped fall soccer begin with five teams in southwest Minneapolis, then it was adopted by the Park Board and offered across the city. He brought ceramics into the system, and also started a program to foster training and the certification of referees for youth sports. And look where we are now.

DOROTHEA NELSON

Dorothea Nelson majored in music and recreation at the University of Minnesota in 1918. She worked in Louisville, Kentucky, and was a major force in women's slow pitch softball. She worked for the Chicago Recreation District. Later, she was based in Japan while working with the Red Cross that oversees recreation programs. In 1948, Dorothea became the first full-time director of a suburban recreation department in St. Louis Park. She was a strong advocate of women's and girls' recreation and athletic teams. She retired in November 1962. Sadly, in 1967, she was killed in a car accident. There are stories of her love for wearing wide-brimmed hats.

JACK NILES

Jack Niles received a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse and did considerable graduate work in physical education and recreation at the University of Minnesota. Jack Niles' work in the recreation field spanned for many years. He began his career as a playground director for Hazel Park under the St. Paul Park and Recreation Board. During his military career he served as athletic and recreation officer at Fort Snelling. Upon his discharge, Jack Niles was employed by the Columbia Heights School District for five years as a physical education teacher and coach. In 1948, Jack was hired as the first recreation director for the community of South St. Paul. During his years as recreation director in South St. Paul, he oversaw the growth and expansion of the community's recreation and park facilities. Jack Niles served as president of the Minnesota Recreation Association in 1952. Jack passed away in 1965.