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PARKS & RECREATION

January 2005

Looking Back and Looking Forward

The beginning of any new year - most especially a year that marks the half way point into a new decade - is always a good time to reflect upon...

...what we already know
 ...emerging trends and patterns
 ...implications of all of the above
 ...opportunities and challenges for parks and recreation
 and
 ... even more importantly, your personal and professional agenda for dealing with these opportunities and challenges.

With that in mind, let's take a look at the following information:

What we already know

- Population is aging but the newly mature groups will not age in the same ways as older Americans have previously; increasing longevity is also a concern
- The population continues to become more diverse particularly among the younger generations of Americans

- Potential of two “competing” cohort groups – the growing (children) and the goldening (older adults)
- Other ethnic groups do not use parks and services in the same ways as white participants

Possible Considerations and Changes:

- The baby boomers will not mature and age in the same manner as previous generation so don't expect to see them fighting for a bingo seat at the senior center. Need to seriously start making changes now.
- While we have made modifications and changes to communicate with and program for diverse members of our communities, we must expand beyond our worthwhile attempt focused programming and translated brochures and address the more substantive area of design of parks, facilities, etc.
- Bringing the community together is an important need for the future. The greater segmentation of society sets the stage for the possibility of potential struggles for resources between the young and the old and the “come heres” and the “from heres” (long time residents and new immigrants)

Additional Demographics

- California remains one of the top six gateway states for new immigrants coming into the country. However, California is also among the top five highest decliners for domestic migration for both whites and African Americans. (*American Demographics*, July/August 2004; see [trendSCAN September](#) for more information)
- Communities with populations less than 50,000 experienced 18% growth in this last decade while urban and suburban areas did not increase at such a high rate. As career opportunities and cultural assets are now available beyond the urban boundaries, people are moving out to seek an affordable, less stressful way of life. (*American Demographics*, July/August 2004; see [trendSCAN September](#) for more information)

Possible Implications

- California will continue to serve as the home for new people and ethnic groups as they enter the United States. However, Americans from across the country no longer view California as the most desirable place to relocate; they still want to visit, but just not live there. This will solidify California's future as being more diverse than most other parts of the United States.
- Urban areas and close-in suburbs will become more diverse and some smaller, more rural areas of California are likely to experience growth. This brings new challenges to formerly homogeneous suburbs and will create increased pressure for expanded services in some communities unaccustomed to such demands. Sense of community comes into play here as the “from heres” often resent the “come heres” (long time residents vs. newcomers)

Public Policy Conditions

The following comments reflect a general view of public policy and governmental spending patterns...

- Societal challenges must be positioned in such a way as to reflect outcomes that are priorities and desirable for all segments of society to ameliorate the ongoing polarization of voters and legislators
- Low levels of interest and participation in the public policy arena continues; 17% of mayoral races in California are unopposed (*USA Today*)

- Money talks and the cost of obesity, health care, community desirability, and independent older adults will move to the forefront as important areas of concerns
- The ICMA report being issued this fall attesting to the role of parks and recreation related to the obesity crisis could create favorable conditions for the field (see [November trendSCAN](#) for more specifics about this report)
- At the state level, California appears poised to address the obesity issue in a big way.
- Voters in states and communities across the country once again demonstrated their interest and strong priority for open space. In this past November election, voters in 12 communities in 24 states passed ballot measures to create \$3.25 billion in new public funding to protect land as parks and open space. That's a continuing trend since 1996; 1,065 out of 1,376 conservation ballot measures have passed in 43 states, raising over \$27 billion in funding for land conservation—a passage rate of 77 percent. (Trust for Public Lands)

Potential Roles for Parks and Recreation:

This is a triple play for our profession. The emphasis and concern about health care costs and the role played by obesity is an optimal situation for parks and recreation related to trails and access to play areas as highlighted in the ICMA report on Active Living Communities ([trendSCAN, November 2004](#)) along with the continuing trend of people's willingness to pass ballot measures for open space should work well for us.

Government Spending

- Local, state, and federal governments spent a record \$167 billion on justice services in 2001; \$254 per capita for police protection, \$130 per capita for judicial and legal services and \$200 per capita for correctional services (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)
- The federal, state, and local corrections population grew by 130,700 or nearly 2% between 2002 and 2003 to reach an all time high; approximately 3.2% or one of every adults are incarcerated, on probation, or parole in 2003 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)
- Health care in the United States costs approximately \$75 billion and \$40 billion of that amount comes from government coffers.

Repositioning Possibilities Continue:

Alternative strategies and programs will be explored to address the cost and quality of life issues of current approaches. This is potentially an opportune time for parks and recreation if we position our programs and services correctly and demonstrate the financial impact of our outcomes.

Civic Engagement

There are two conflicting developments that currently reflect civic life in this country. The growing centralization of government, in some cases, leads to diminishing influence from the general public. The second development is the formation of a new layer of sub-local groups, both public and private such as residential community and condominium associations; property owner-based business improvement districts in nearly all major cities; neighborhood improvement districts in large cities; and even self-governing public schools. A book published earlier this year, *Neighborhood Futures*, addresses how citizen involvement and actions will shape the future of neighborhoods and society overall. (*Neighborhood Futures: Citizen Rights and Local Control* George W. Liebmann)

Implications:

Implications for parks and recreation is quite mixed related to this approach. Will such civic engagement lead to more NIMBYism or more genuine interest in the overall best for everyone? Watch this one unfold carefully. It may be hard to do determine which and whose side we should be on.

Related information

While it is virtually impossible to include all the information that may shape and influence the next three to five years, there are some data that might be of particular interest including:

- Ninety-five million Americans live alone (Census Bureau)
- Approximately half (47%) of 17 to 24 year olds think the most appealing feature of government employment is the opportunity to help people and make a difference; an increase from 38% in 2002 (Council for Excellence in Government)
- Nearly one in four adults in the United States (38%) has a chronic health condition; an additional 11% suffer from 2 such conditions (Center on an Aging Society, Georgetown University)
- Forty-seven percent of Americans feel that immigrants are a bad influence upon America compared with the 42% of Americans who think the influence is good; 53% of Mexican feel negatively about immigrants as well (IPSOS Public Affairs)
- Nearly three quarters of Latinos feel that it is either “very important” (38%) or “somewhat important” (35%) for Latino immigrants to make changes to blend into the larger society. However, more than 9 in 10 Latinos feel that it is either “very important” (66%) or somewhat important (27%) for Latinos to maintain their distinct culture (2004 National Survey of Latinos in the United States)
- Educational attainment determines the monetary/career success of individuals; over the work lifespan, people with a college degree make almost twice as much as people with high school degree (\$2.1 million compared to \$1.2 million). The smallest increase in high school diplomas was among Hispanic Americans (Census Bureau)

Implications and Possibilities:

There are a number of factors and trends within this category that reinforce the importance of creating community – people through a variety of circumstances not socially connected, distrustful and/or dislike of one another, and those youth seemingly shut out of the American dream.

Patterns and Expenditures

Americans spend their time and money on a variety of pursuits and products. While these are just a sample of such data presented here, consider how this information influences the future of parks and recreation.

- Today’s teenagers spend 16.7 hours a week online not including email and 13.6 hours in front of the TV.
- The public now spends \$70 billion a year on gambling; nearly 3 times the amount spent on movie tickets, concerts, sporting events, and theater performances combined. Internet gambling is expected to reach \$6 billion in 2004.
- The average American household spends \$215 per year on pets and that figure includes all households not just those with pets in the home; the biggest spenders on pets are the 45-64 year olds who spend 30-34% more than average (*New Strategists Publications*)
- Nearly six in ten wealthier American consumers receive the greatest satisfaction from experiences, i.e. travel, sporting events, arts and culture, fine dining, and entertainment than purchasing products (American Express Platinum Luxury Survey)
- Eight of the 15 most popular sports among older Americans (55+) are fitness oriented

the other six are outdoor activities (*Superstudy of Sports Participation 2004*)

- U.S. consumers spent \$367 billion on entertainment and media in 2003. The winning categories of expenditures in 2004 include sports up 9.2%; internet access spending up 10.3%; filmed entertainment up 7.3%; TV networks up 9.6% and videogames up 7.2%. What do these behavior preferences have in common? (*Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2004-2008*)
- Sixty-three percent of all travelers shop while they travel; more than half of those surveyed indicated that shopping was the primary or secondary purpose of their trips (Travel Industry Association of America)
- One half of Americans (49%) tried to lose at least 5 pounds while another 16% tried to retain current weight; only 20% of those individuals termed their efforts successful or extremely successful (*IHRSA/ASD Obesity-Weight Control Report*)
- The majority of health club members in the United States are better educated and wealthier than the average American who does not have these types of memberships
- 85% of women surveyed indicated that stress is a serious issue for them (Crabtree & Evelyn study cited in *Marketing to Women*)
- Expenditures on spa treatments reached 11.1 million in 2003 (*USA Today*)

Implications and Challenges:

- How do we create enticing and positive opportunities for people to lure them away from technology?
- What approaches will curb the growth of passive pursuits such as gambling, shopping, and entertainment?
- How do we take advantage of the opportunities in fitness, physical activities, and stress reduction?

There are no easy answers to these questions!

Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities and challenges are listed together because many factors can go in either direction depending upon the pre-planning and attention paid to these issues. Consider some of the following as they relate to the profession of parks and recreation:

An Aging Population

- How will we deal with the varying groups of older adults based upon age, level of health available resources, etc.?
- What will happen if senior centers don't change in time to attract the huge baby boom group? The youngest of the boomers turns 40 this year while the older end of the boom reaches 58. Times awastin'
- In what way can parks and recreation help to retain older adults as independent, contributing members of communities?

Sense of Community and Belonging

- What role can parks and recreation play in creating connections between a older predominantly white cohort and a younger, more diverse group?
- What are the strategies that our profession can use to immerse ourselves in a myriad of

different cultures in such a way that supports community and health?

- How can we help people of all origins come to know and respect one another?
- Increased uses of technology contribute to people's feelings of being "invisible", i.e. "if you want to change your order, press 1; if you want to check your order, press 2" etc. Can parks and recreation address that void?
- More people will live alone and pets make wonderful companions but how do we keep these individuals connected and involved with other human beings and their community?

Health and Wellness

- Obesity is an epidemic in the United States; particular concerns are for women of color and Hispanic and African American children with type 2 diabetes
- How can we maximize the promise for our profession of the ICMA report?
- Can we re-position our services as helping to reduce levels of stress?

Economic Future of California

- How can we deliver programs and services that reduce spending on health care, poverty, prisons, etc. and then position those programs with decision-makers and the general public as alternatives that present a win-win from both the economic and quality of life point of view?
- How do we raise the economic status of immigrants by supporting youth as they complete a high school education and then go on to additional education?

Quality of Life in General

- Look at the percentages of people and amount of money being spent on passive and leisure activities versus than positive forms of discretionary time. What can and will we do?
- What about the resources and damage to quality of life of expenditures upon obesity, incarceration, and other human circumstances. Really no easy answers here.

TIPs (Trends Into Practice)

As you get ready to undertake strategic or master plans or update existing plans, make sure those plans address the following:

Changing Demographics: Who will we really be in 5, 10, or 15 years?

Diversity: How can reality-based knowledge of various cultures and the implications for park development and staff recruitment be infused into our department?

Marketing: Incorporation of marketing, not just as promotion, but a real sense of how to differentiate between various segments of the population and alter programs and services accordingly

Creating Community: How to envision programs, facilities, open space, and services that bring the potentially conflicting groups together so they come to know one another? Think older and young, different ethnic groups, public and private groups with different points of view, the list is nearly endless.

Health Programming: The overall focus of a department for the next 10 years needs to be uniting and infusing healthy information, supporting healthy behavior, and addressing health outcomes through ongoing services.

Task Force for Older Adults: Form a group that makes recommendations for immediate, incremental changes right away in this critical area; not just an issue for parks and recreation invite everybody to the table.

Task Force for Education and Recreation: Bring community groups together to address the challenges of educating youth, most especially Latino youth

Action Plan for Recruitment: It's been a long time since young people have recognized the rewards of government service, let's make the most of this opportunity

Leisure Facilitation: Begin to shift your focus from direct service such as programs to indirect approaches to move people from the couch and away from the screen to take part in product outlets for leisure time. Think skill development, lifelong leisure learning, etc.

Recreation is Therapeutic (and it always has been): Consider ways to better integrate the knowledge and skills of TR with general recreation; the newly desirable outcomes for community recreation are very similar to those practiced by TR since its inception.

Social Capital: Using Putnam's more recent community projects findings to build social capital through future development with an emphasis upon both bonding and bridging. According to Putnam and Feldstein, social capital generation takes time and effort; is a local phenomenon; and is more effective when smaller groups build to larger networks (bonding = bringing a like group together and bridging = bringing groups different from one another together)

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