

Celebrating 25 Years of Service!

Winterset Parks and Recreation Department

By John Pletchette, Director

A new department in the City of Winterset (pop. 4,900) began operation 25 years ago. City officials decided it was time for John Wayne's hometown to improve leisure services. The Winterset Parks and Recreation Department (WPRD) officially began on July 5, 1983. A policy-making five member Park and Recreation Board, replacing a separate Park Board (est. 1915) and a Recreation Commission (est. 1972) would oversee the WPRD. The plan for the WPRD was to coordinate existing community park and recreation functions and then with time/resources expand leisure opportunities in Winterset.

Existing programs and activities in 1983 included: seasonal park maintenance operation; reservation system for one shelter house; small campground operation; outdoor pool operation; tennis lesson program; various youth and adult sports programs. The staff in 1983 was a full-time Director, 2 semi-retired part-time seasonal park maintenance people, one part-time summer ball diamond maintenance person (P.E. teacher and now Mayor) and the seasonal outdoor pool staff. The new department in the beginning would manage 86 acres of parks, facilities and open spaces. In 1983 the WPRD total operating budget was \$97,000 with \$37,000 of revenues.

Spring ahead a few years to 2008. The WPRD now sponsors nearly 50 recreation programs for all ages and manages 132 acres of parks, sports fields, open spaces and related facilities. Two new adult softball fields opened in 1986. The fields are swarmed with activity for all ages March through October. In 1995, the modern City Park Campground opened for business in time for the Annual Madison County Covered Bridge Festival. Each year, the new campground and local economy enjoys around 4,000 over-night stays from visitors. An exciting time in Winterset was the 2006 opening of the Winterset Aquatic Center. Our second year attendance in 2007 topped 45,000. The WAC replaced our aging 1960 traditional 'L' shaped outdoor pool. Other major developments have been a new neighborhood park, new play structures, shelter house renovations, and new tennis courts.

Groundbreaking will be held in June for Phase I (Soccer Fields) of our proposed Winterset Youth Sports Complex. The staff today includes three full-time positions: Director, Recreation Specialist, and Park Operations Manager. The seasonal staff totals almost 50, with 44 at the aquatic center. Total WPRD operating budget is now \$550,000 expenditures and \$230,000 of revenues. All this is possible because of wonderful support from our community. Support for parks in Winterset goes back to 1915 when the original 3-member Park Board was established and development of City Park began.

Recent examples of community support include: City voters approving three special tax levies (inc. local option sales tax in 2003); several successful community fund drives for special projects; 21 dedicated WPRD Board members who have served at various times since 1983; supportive City Council, Mayor and City Administrator; cooperation from fellow City departments, Winterset Schools, area youth sports clubs, and other agencies; countless individuals and businesses who have been volunteer coaches and/or team sponsors; 35 acres of park land have been donated to the City; and many community minded citizens who have served on planning committees for a special cause.

WPRD Director, John Pletchette is grateful to the City of Winterset, for this career opportunity. He is very appreciative of the many community minded citizens who have supported parks and recreation programs and projects. The Iowa Park and Recreation Association has been a huge resource and helping hand throughout the years as well. In looking back at the early years, it never seemed possible that we could implement so many recreation activities and construct these fabulous facilities in Winterset. The price tag for just the aquatic center and soccer complex is \$4M. Three keys to big projects are- people, time, and money. Plans are being finalized for some special summer events to honor 25 years. Also, the WPRD has ordered some fun promotional items (pens, coloring books, magnets) to handout this summer.

Any small town, just getting started with a department or considering the concept, who is looking for some helpful information, Pletchette would enjoy talking to your community about the first 25 years of the WPRD operation. *The benefits are endless.....*