

## **Ray Kisiah**

### **Side 1:**

[2] For 10 years he was assistant Parks and Recreation Director in Charlotte. He then went to High Point where he rebuilt their system with Federal funds. [Phin Horton, Dick Wood]

[14] He was recruited by Asheville in 1971. He toured the city and found that at one time there had been a good system but because of the Depression it had deteriorated.

[53] He visited Lake Julian (it was transferred to the Buncombe County System and managed for two years under contract) and Bee Tree which was well-maintained. The rest of the system was under-funded. [Ralph Vogenberger, Augusta Barnett]

[71] He shocked the city council by saying that this was the worst Park System he had ever seen. He was told he would "spend the city into bankruptcy." He said that if they were interested in building a good system to let him know. The time was right. Urban renewal and Model Cities programs had just began. [James "Red" Hoyle]

[100] He knew how to match Federal funds with other funds; i.e., Model City had \$300,000 for a recreation area on Mountain Street and with this he could go to HUD for neighborhood funds. The Asheville Housing Authority put it all together and \$710,000 was used to buy and remodel old Livingston Street School which with an added gym didn't cost the city a dime and opened in 1976.

[163] He matched the Model City budget of \$150,000 for Montford with cities grant, acquired land and developed a center.

[186] He put \$100,000 into buying equipment and, using this equipment built the Montford Recreation Center. (Bill Moore architect - see his tape).

[201] He went through the system and rebuilt the parks. By using his own equipment and crew, which was being trained, he could handle most construction work and charge back 50% as rental for equipment. [Richard Meehan]

[281] Recreation Park was in bad condition. There were 100,000 visitors a year but the city could not support a real zoo (Milwaukee spends 15 million dollars a year on theirs and Parks and Recreation was receiving only \$130,000 a year for the whole city).

[310] The vice chairman of the board [Mrs. James Westall - Junior League President, 1957-1959] worked with the Junior League, which raised \$300,000 and took on the project and developed the new nature center. Many organizations contributed to the undertaking (see interview with Jeanne Cummings). [Virginia (Mrs. James) Westall, Jeanne (Mrs. Charles) Cummings, Audie (Mrs. Robert) Bayer, Frank De Saix]

[403] When he first came he took pictures of faults in the existing facilities which he showed to the City Council. Asheville paid the least of 5 job offers he had had. He took a drastic cut in salary but he and his wife wanted to live here and the timing was right. [Henry Colton, Wayne Montgomery ]

[479] Weaver Park is highly visible and he decided to highlight this. He moved the creek over to make more room for a ball field, created a basketball area, tennis courts, dugouts, picnic and toilet facilities within 1.5 years. This was all done with Federal funds.

## **Side 2:**

[2/4] Development of recreational areas along the Swannanoa and French Broad rivers is concern of his and the Chamber of Commerce.

[2/28] In 1974-75 he was made President of the American Parks and Recreation Society. He had a chance to travel to municipal, county and Federal locations and speak across country. He preached to council members adding, "If you don't want me, I'm gone." The timing was right. His first emphasis was to fix up, renovating what existed and later to build. He mentions Montford, Oakley Park, Kenilworth, Shiloh Recreation Center and the new West Asheville Park.

[2/68] When he first came, he shocked the council with his "shopping list" (see newspaper write-ups). The community supported him. Over a 10-year period 15 million dollars were appropriated. During this build-up time the last 10% was left for later - the landscaping.

[2/83] The Martin Luther King Park was landscaped from the beginning.

[2/91] He thinks the closing of the Bee Tree Park a mistake. He believes a water system can operate as a recreation source (and a money maker) at the same time. Lake Julian has been transferred to the county. He believes Asheville should be a city and county system - this would save on job and expense duplication. [Curtis Radcliff]

[2/155] The county and city cooperate and there are attempts to have a merger. However, with the county being led by Republicans and the city by Democrats there is a "fear of the Unknown." In 1973 the county started the Lake Julian program and a series of river parks along with the TVA on the French Broad. They also started a program for retarded citizens (Association of Retarded Citizens) with Special Olympics.

[2/196] The municipal golf course was well-planned but poorly maintained. It has been improved with the equipment bought. Aston Park tennis center has been developed. The McCormick Memorial Stadium is a county-wide operation. [Donald Ross]

[2/230] Arguments over the water systems, rates, and tax equity is discussed. Various parks and facilities are shifted back and forth between the city and county management. In operating cost alone, \$160,000 a year would be saved if the Stadium were under joint management.

[2/326] The city manager requested that the cemetery be taken out of Public Works. By joining with Parks and Recreation and using their equipment, money was saved. They also are in charge of anything (trees, grass, etc.) growing. [Ernest Ward]

[2/355] The mayor got money from the model city fund to plant trees in Montford Park. An urban forester advises on the care and trimming of trees (see Lord tape). [Dick Wood, Tony Lord]

[2/394] The first tree commission was formed. Every time a tree is taken out, one must be put in its place. Quality Forward is heading this. The Youth Council worked with the Quality '76 commission. A Taste Treat (International Taste Festival) was held. [Susan Roderick, Leslie Anderson]

[2/422] There was no concerted effort to beautify the city through trees before this period. Now there is "Releaf" Asheville. Independent organizations and merchants made donations of trees. Parks and Rec. plant and maintain (see Jean Webb and Tony Lord tapes). [Susan Roderick]

[2/461] Part of the success of the P and R program is tapping the cooperation of other organizations; i.e. the Youth League works with coaches, trains, and helps with technical details. There is a chess program. [Joe Noertker]

[2/581] His philosophy is expressed - to contribute to the physical, mental, moral, and economic health of the community.