



# The Collaborative Spirit Can Transform Parks & Recreation Worldwide

## 合作精神可把公園康樂變得世界性

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兒童是未來社會的棟樑，培養兒童成為一位良好的公民是家長和老師的責任。在兒童成長過程中，給與具教育意義的運動及康樂活動是兒童教育裡的重要一環。要做好這份工作，非個人，一個地區，甚至一個國家所能達成，我們應該做效野鵝在冬季南飛的V字隊形：互相合作，鼓勵，幫助和輪流領先，以減少獨自飛行前進所遇到的阻力。憑着這種合作精神，公園及康樂的發展更能邁向世界性，從中令更多兒童受惠。

### Introduction

Springfield College, Springfield Massachusetts, U.S.A. has long been internationally recognized for its role in preparing students to serve in the helping professions worldwide. "The most important consideration in implementing sport policy includes 'working together' as partners (Fu, 1993, P.37). This quote by Hong Kong Baptist University Professor Dr. Frank Fu, a distinguished Springfield College Graduate, and a call from Dr. Larry Neal at the University of Oregon, U.S.A. encouraged the author to respectfully submit this presentation to the international audience. Many people care deeply about the fate of young people. Miss Ho Kam Bing, Boy's & Girl's Club of Hong Kong, stated at the First World Recreation Congress in 1964, that there is a close relationship between delinquency and broken homes, poverty, low educational standard, idleness, and lack of parental control (Ho, 1964). As one reads further, the gist of Dr. Fu and Miss Ho's statements demonstrate that the world ought to foster interrelations by enrolling in visionary groups, who are committed to the magical results of collaborative teamwork.

### Children Are Our Future

The following remarks underscore our collective responsibility toward all children. Horrifying accounts of citizens under siege in neighborhoods have become a mainstay in the news. Community leaders anguish as they consider the deadly consequences of the mindless violence and its effects on our next generation. This past Halloween evening, a vibrant caring nine year old boy was gunned down in the cross fire in Boston, Massachusetts U.S.A. while he was trick or treating with his parents on the night of his birthday. The loss of one child is one too many and a tragedy for all of mankind. Sadly, stories like this young boy's are commonplace. In the small manufacturing town of Holyoke, Mass. 5,000 of the 7,400 students enrolled in the school system stayed home from classes on October 31, because of the threat of gang initiation. William J. Bennett (1994) found that eight out of every ten Americans can expect to be the victim of a violent crime once in their lives.

The challenge before us goes well beyond helping those children most at risk. The future of all countries is dependent upon a broad base of youth who will be required to work together in order to function in a rapidly changing complex global economy. What are the proper roles for government?

Is government dead? Let's consider the role of government in the context of this challenge. Modern politicians are steadfast in the pursuit of tax limiting legislation. During election campaigns voters hear promises of lean business approaches to government and how crime, corruption, nepotism, and waste will be eliminated. At the same time, city managers struggle to maximize resources for essential programs in "mandated" departments. Parks and Recreation agencies endure annual cutbacks as other agendas take precedence. Most often, the safety net provided by the collaborative partnerships between municipal parks and recreation and community resources are forgotten amidst the chaos. Too often, broken promises materialize because subtle political patronage havens are maximized through sophisticated payback schemes to the benefits of families and friends by those in power.

Leisure theorist, Max Kaplan forecast today's changing world as one in which mankind would be "condemned to leisure", accompanied by violence, idleness, and chaos. Reflect upon the numbers of misguided youth who wander the malls and streets of our cities. Consider the appointments to key positions by those unqualified political hacks while others are relegated to uncertain and even perpetual unemployment and hopeless lives. Cornell economist Robert Frank, defines today's society as a winner take all economy. A few business superstars and some favored government counterparts are reaping astronomical earnings while the decline of other classes escalates (Bennett, 1994).

Since the times of Aristotle and his writings, man's struggle with work and leisure has evolved. In a discussion of happiness, Aristotle (335 B.C.) suggested that cultivated and active men should confer excellence upon other through government rather than honor upon oneself as the end of the political life. Have the modern municipal and state politicians and managers done all that they can in these regards? Innovative, collaborative solutions to urban problems can be elusive but are attainable if we all work together.



In vogue business approaches, promoted by a few high level executives generally demonstrate a limited understanding of America's struggle in utilizing its time. Cut back tactics do not remedy problems and are stop gap solutions at best. Is it possible to reinvent forms of government that will save hundreds of thousands of taxpayers dollars and serve our most cherished resource-our youth, the leaders of the next generation? Management guru, Peters (1987) emphasizes responsiveness, listening, innovation, self-managing teams, simplified structure, and deferral to front line employees and customers. These private sector remedies can increase government output and begin to improve life in our cities but will fail if they become a "stand alone" solution.

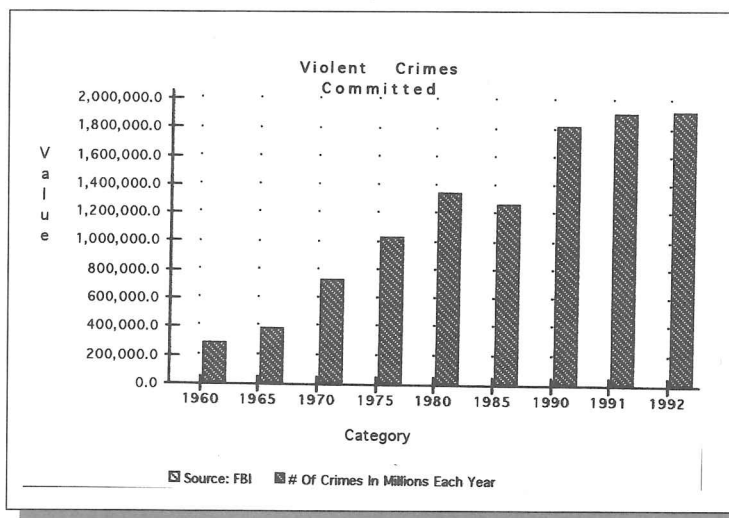
President Clinton stated that every child needs a role model and preferably it ought to be a parent. The President then went on to say that it is vital that someone fill this role if parents cannot, so the country can begin to turn around the problems of youth (Bennett, 1994). McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman (1994) profile the other part of the solution countries must implement and soon. Neighborhood government partnerships that feature a demonstration of commitment , a passionate belief in the potential of youths, authenticity, opportunities, real responsibilities and real work, clear rules and discipline, and a focus on the future, point the way out from amidst all the chaos. Instead of dismantling the lower priority service agencies, citizens must brainstorm entrepreneurial methods for sustaining their existence with a focus toward safety, quality, and innovation that make sense for all.

This presentation highlights examples of how one park and recreation department in America harnessed the power of collaborative teamwork. Over one half million dollars in annual taxes were saved while 192 new, safe, captivating, quality programs and activities were added for its youth. Even more remarkable, was the fact that these community wide collaborative endeavors were accomplished while simultaneously cleaning up a government system that had violated the public trust. The price paid was steep. Personnel assaults and crime investigation teams accompanied an all out effort to win over a demoralized civil service staff fraught with frustration and despair. Some had given up and opted for the creature comforts of no-show jobs. 99% "Caught the Spirit" and the outcomes of their cooperative labors harnessed the exceptional powers of teamwork.

### Background Information : Chaos In The Neighborhoods

William J. Bennett's (1994) report card on America provides a sobering portrait of changes that have occurred since 1960. Consider the following social indicators in the context of all you hear and read about in the daily news.

Bennett (1994) found that the fastest growing segment of the criminal population is the nation's children. Moreover, 70 percent of the juvenile offenders in long term correction facilities grew up without a father in the household and approximately 90 percent of single-parent homes are homes without a father.



Galston and Kamark, chief domestic advisors to President Clinton, found that the economic consequences of a parent's absence are often accompanied by psychological consequences which include higher than average suicide, low intellectual educational performance, and higher rates of mental illness, violence and drug use (Bennett, 1994).

Ho's (1964) statement in 1964 sounds very similar. It has been suggested by Brubaker of Colgate University that punishment is the mirror image of praise and the need for a more stringent judicial system is justified (Bennet, 1994). Many would agree to a more stringent judicial system can become part of the solution. Park and recreation professionals and the community support network must look beyond this chaos and consider pro-active rather than re-active collaborative solutions. Community violence is escalating even though arrest rates are up. The U.S.A. crime bill may increase arrest rates further. The state of Indiana, U.S.A. spends \$29,000 per year to incarcerate one individual. DYS (Department of Youth Services) agencies in the New England area expend similar dollars while holding youth offenders. Without suggesting that type of annual per capita expenditure, imagine what could be accomplished if that amount of money was invested in each child and family unit.

No one dimensional approach can change this chaotic environment. The combination of caring, collaborative, and cutting edge business oriented partnerships offer our best hope in reversing some our youth's problems. Witt (1994), a leisure sociologist at Texas A. & M. compares the culture of today to the early sixties through playground signage. His comparison provides a blunt statement about one legacy of this generation.

**Lessons Learned From The Business World**

Business management authors (Kayser, 1994 ; Belasco & Stayer, 1993) have begun to promote the importance of collaboration, in its most pure and genuine form, namely through the example of geese. Kayser (1994) found that the V formation used by geese to fly south for the winter, adds at least 71% greater flying range. Moreover, whenever a goose falls out of formation, the drag of going it alone is felt immediately. Kayser (1994) also found that geese also honk from behind to encourage the leader and they all rotate into the lead position. Geese remain with their mate for life. When a goose gets sick or falls out of formation, two geese fall out and follow it down for protection staying until it is able to fly or is dead, and then they head out to catch up with their original group.

How can government and community agencies learn from the geese and business leadership? The power of collaborative team work was harnessed in Brookline, Massachusetts through a commitment to these the following approaches and solutions:

**Business Actions:**

**1. Open Communication & Trust Amongst The Flock!**

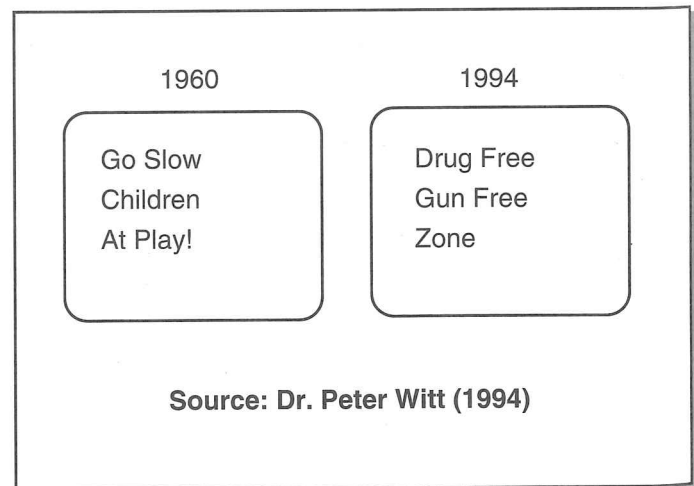
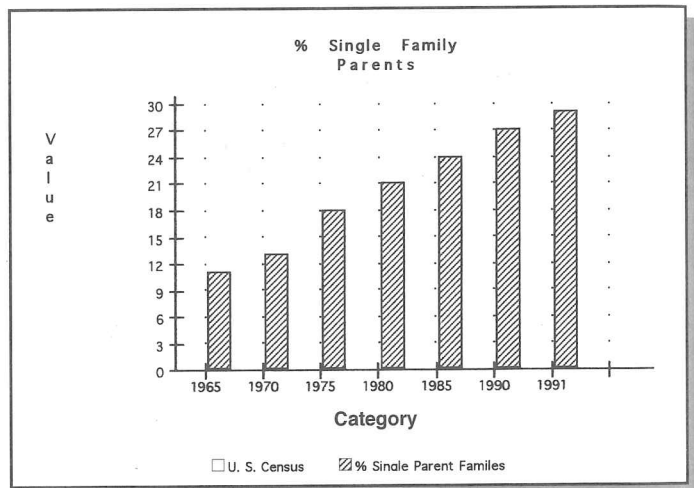
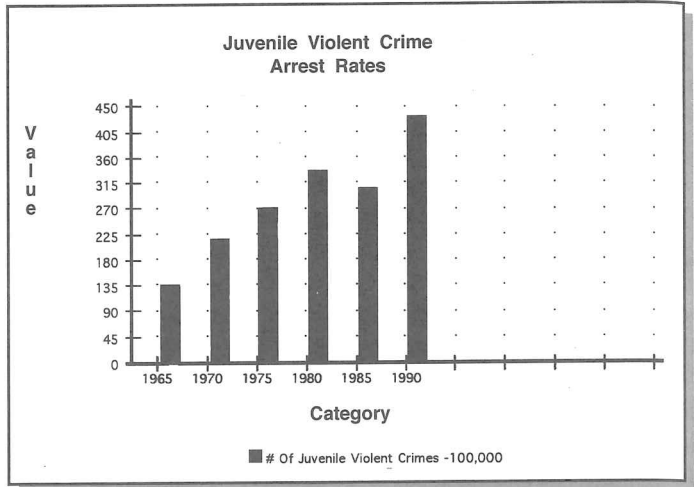
Violations of the public trust in government are very serious. Integrity was reestablished and demanded of everyone. A climate of trust and open communication was pivotal. Just as the geese find security and support in the flock, the collaborative model provided its first major dividend by creating an atmosphere of open communication and trust of one another.

**2. Honking Geese Announce Their Arrival And Encourage Their Leaders!**

A community wide "Catch the Spirit" campaign was the central driving force that embodied a partnership of the press, the political leadership, the staff, the business community, private sector providers, the neighborhoods, and 450 very special volunteers. The campaign's logo was marketed and promoted everywhere and even the doubters and naysayers joined the growing flock in this dynamic turn about of events.

**3. A Clear Understanding Of The Mission Was Present!**

Each year geese know instinctively to head south. The collaborative team through the Parks and Recreation Commission, defined the mission and promoted its vision through the "Catch the Spirit" campaign. Care was also taken to continually update the mission in accordance with customer preferences.





#### **4. All Geese Share The Lead And Encourage Those Up Front!**

Everyone in the collaborative neighborhood partnerships were empowered and the most important employees became those on the front lines.

#### **5. Geese Remain With Their Mate For Life And Train Their Young For Their Role Within The Flock!**

Active listening and group facilitation skills were featured in all training programs. The niche of every organization complimented one another instead of competing.

#### **6. The Goals Of The Flock Are Paramount!**

Customer/mission driven government was featured. The 24/48 hour response rule to all letters and phone calls became indicative of the commitment to responsiveness.

#### **7. The Route The Geese Fly Is Rich In Resources!**

Several significant financial reversals at major facilities enabled the department to create certain "cash cows" whose profits generated enough annual funds to offset 80% of the department's significant operating budget and to fund an \$888,463 capital improvement program without tax support. Privatization, load shedding, steering committees, gifts and donations, sponsorship, bartering, and other cutting edge strategies were endorsed and implemented in the turnaround. School buildings served as the hub of recreation services and provided safe havens for the flocks of residents who utilized them.

#### **8. When A Goose Is Sick Or Injured, Two Geese Stay With It For Protection!**

A commitment to job security for the full-time staff was pivotal even in the face of -15% and -25% budget reductions. Local authority and autonomous units were featured. Staff morale skyrocketed while employee morale in other departments plummeted.

#### **9. The V Formation Is Efficient!**

The Organization was streamlined and top management got out from behind their desks and into the field. Design review teams and customer advisory boards were established for each operation and projects. Change and innovation were rewarded. Technology and other job tools were first class.

#### **10. Geese Rest And Assess Weather Conditions During Their Long Journey!**

Results were measured, discussed, evaluated, and marketed. The mission was constantly refined and polished so that the outputs of the organization would feature safety and quality without compromising the needs of the most needy.

### **Lessons Learned About Leadership & Caring**

Joseph Lee, considered to be the "Father of the Playground Movement" in America, was born in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1862. He along with Dr. Luther Gulick, who taught at Springfield College in 1887, worked tirelessly to establish America's first National Playground Association. The motivation for these pioneers, and other park and recreation leaders, centered around eliminating abominable conditions brought about by the industrialization of America. Their devoted service, created a legacy for all children and adults who have enjoyed America's parks and recreation system. These visionary men and women strove to eliminate shoddy management, dishonesty in public office, injustice toward youth, and a commitment to the creation of safe playgrounds and the training of qualified role models who would become the heroes for the youth in those times. The problems of today are different in some respects, however, the negative effects of each era's social problems parallel one another and would be considered unacceptable by all generations. The discussion that follows, highlights McLaughlin's et al. (1994) highly successful youth leadership variables.

### **Leadership Variables Within A Collaborative System**

#### **1. Management too often functions as top down leaders :**

Many government CEO managers are mired in the political stratosphere and have little understanding of what really happens in the field. Streamlined, bottom up, organizational structures easily overcome the leader's outdated systems.

#### **2. Real responsibilities and real work for youth :**

A privately funded \$20,000 all night prom party held at a local college, was planned by Brookline's teens and delivered by over 220 community leaders and very special volunteers. Moreover, Recreation Activities For Teens (R.A.F.T.) was a creative set of teen activities whose outcomes go far beyond services. The youthful leaders and every support person, transformed a collective vision into top flight services delivered by talented, caring role models. All of this was accomplished within a business system that featured safety, quality, and support. A 'Hire One' program that functioned as a private sector hiring facilitation service was funded and continues to flourish.

**3. Opportunities for youth were added at a rapid pace and each was accompanied by clear rules & regulations:**

All programs were fully inclusionary and no one was turned away for an inability to pay. 192 new, captivating programs were added. Participation rates were unbelievable and every community resource was tapped as bureaucratic obstacles were eliminated by determined citizens. All the adult role models and the students themselves developed and monitored the ground rules for participation. High risk activities that included overnight trips, the all-night prom party, and other adventures, incorporated procedural contingencies and operational manuals, as well as agreed upon standing orders, that were developed by the team.

**4. The project teams were invigorated by the journey back to a place and time that featured their input and ideas:**

**Commitment**

Most staff, when off the clock, stayed late because of their commitment to the team and kids. Most staff supplemented departmental resources with items they brought from home. Several staff, who returned to work from extended worker's comp cases, had to be encouraged to stop working 12 and 14 hour days.

**A passionate belief in the potential of youths**

Youth from all walks of life were respected and listened to. At the slightest hint of variance, training with a focus toward multi-culturalism was featured.

**Authenticity**

Even the geese had goose bumps as they watched 535 teens dance to the sounds of their favorite d.j. every Friday evening or enjoy the numerous outings as part of the R.A.F.T. program.

**5. The Future of Our Youth :**

The mission of Springfield College is to be the preeminent institution educating students in spirit, mind, and body to excel in humanitarian service which is the foundation of the College's unique Humanics Philosophy. That mission is proving to be critical given all the chaos in our neighborhoods. The students in this author's History and Philosophy class and the Organization and Administration class assisted in the preparation of this presentation. These individuals, President Randolph Bromery, Dean Rau, the college's Vision 2003 team, and the faculty who teach at Springfield College, represent a renowned group, who are committed to the magical results of collaborative teamwork. Springfield is dedicated to the surrounding community and the college demonstrates this partnership through scholarly endeavor, community service, and excellence in teaching.

There are other flocks throughout the world waiting to form and deliver the strategies and solutions that communities are in desperate need of . Yours is the choice to charge ahead on your own or "Catch the Spirit" and soar high above in search of the answers to some of our era's toughest problems. The youth of the world are counting on your lead.



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