

## Robert W. Crawford (1906-1995)

Robert W. Crawford, a graduate of Des Moines University, New York University, and the National Recreation School, served the park and recreation field for over forty years. He was recognized on both the national and international levels as one of the top authorities in the field of recreation and parks. He was renowned for his innovative and creative leadership. His hallmark in the park and recreation field arose from his dedication to community involvement and from his creative innovations in planning and operating recreation facilities and programs. He was the first professional elected to serve as President of the National Recreation and Park Association. His honors include an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Public Service from Temple University and an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Law from Grinnell College. Mr. Crawford's career began in 1934 when he served as Director of Recreation for Hastings-in- Hudson, New York. He later became Superintendent of Recreation in Montclair, New Jersey. From 1946 to 1952, he served as Superintendent of Recreation in Oakland, California. He accepted the recreation administrator's position in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1952, where he remained until his retirement in 1981. During the last part of his tenure, he served as both Commissioner of Recreation and as President of Fairmont Park Commission.

When Robert Crawford went to Philadelphia in 1952 to direct the city's newly organized Department of Recreation, he took over a program consisting of less than a dozen of facilities. During his 29 year tenure in Philadelphia, he developed a recreation program that now has a total of 853 facilities including 47 recreation centers, 145 playgrounds, 24 park playgrounds, 84 swimming pools, 192 neighborhood parks, 10 play lots, four ice rinks, seven youth camps, and 15 specialty sites including Veterans Stadium and Kennedy Stadium. Under his leadership, the city developed one of the finest recreation systems in the country. Philadelphia's Department of Recreation encompassed not only neighborhood parks and playgrounds of the most imaginative and creative design, but included one of the most extensive sport and cultural programs in the nation.

Commissioner Crawford's commitment to community involvement motivated him to establish the Recreation Advisory Council, which grew from seven original members to 3,000 citizen advisors participating in 127 local advisory councils, 12 district councils, and one citywide group. The Philadelphia Department of Recreation became the foremost proponent in the country for citizen participation in the planning, organizing, and developing of community recreation programs.

Crawford felt a deep responsibility in preparing leaders for the future. While in Philadelphia, he developed in cooperation with the National Recreation and Park Association a nationally recognized post-masters internship program that trained 42 graduates selected from colleges and universities throughout the country. He assisted graduates from this program to assume leadership positions in the recreation and park field.

Robert W. Crawford played a key role in the formation of both the National Recreation and Park Association and the National Recreation Foundation. While serving as Executive Director of the National Recreation Foundation, he advanced many new programs around the country, and he created many new entities, including the Recreation and Park Hall of Fame. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001. Beyond the Hall of Fame two other programs are named in his honor; The Crawford Lecture and the [Robert W. Crawford Young Professional Award](#).

**For more on Robert W. Crawford:**

- City of Philadelphia [Recreation Department History](#)
- American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, Interview with Robert W. Crawford for the [Legends in the Field Series](#)
- Temple University [Robert W. Crawford Manuscript Collection](#)
- National Recreation Foundation [Robert W. Crawford Achievement Prize](#)