



**Phil T. Hester**

Phil T. Hester recently retired from the City of Long Beach as Director of the Parks, Recreation & Marine Department with over 40 years of parks and recreation experience. He was born in North Carolina, graduated from North Carolina State University, and received his Masters from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. As a person who participated in sports all his life, it seemed only logical that his first professional recreation position would be as an Athletic Director with the City of Danville, Virginia. He soon was promoted to Assistant Director of the department. He then took a position in Raleigh, North Carolina. This position allowed him to gather experience working with seniors, special groups, special events, outdoor activities, etc. Mr. Hester then became a member of the staff of a new state agency in Virginia called the Virginia State Office of Recreation. As a State Recreation Consultant, he traveled around the state working with local communities in establishing new park and recreation agencies. After a few years as a State Recreation Consultant, he was promoted to Chief of the State Office of Recreation. While with the Commonwealth of Virginia, the office helped in the establishment of over 85 new park and recreation agencies in Virginia.

While working with one of these jurisdictions, Chesterfield County, Virginia, Mr. Hester was given the opportunity to be the first Director of a community which, at that time, was the fastest growing county in the nation. As the first Director, he had the opportunity to hire staff, develop the budget, initiate new programs, develop new parks, and generally develop the department from the beginning. It was quite a challenge, which ultimately led to the department being selected, in 1985-86, as the Best Operated Department in the nation by the National Association of Park and Recreation Executives. While in Virginia, Mr. Hester was active in the Virginia Park and Recreation Society, and ultimately served as its President.

In 1986, Mr. Hester made a major career and life change by accepting a position as Assistant Director of the Los Angeles County Park and Recreation Department, one of the largest parks and recreation agencies in the nation. After a couple of years, he was given the opportunity to move to Long Beach to oversee a number of divisions and sections that were being combined under one

manager, as part of a major department reorganization. As the newly created Manager of Parks and Development, Mr. Hester became responsible for parks, beaches, golf courses, marinas, community centers, and the capital improvement program for the Department. With the economic challenges in the early 1990's to late 1990's in California, the department was forced to make numerous changes, while continuing to provide excellent service to its citizens. Even with these numerous challenges, the department was recognized as a Gold Medal winner by the National Recreation and Park Association in 1998, as the best Parks and Recreation agency in the nation.

In January 1999, Mr. Hester became Director of the Long Beach Park, Recreation and Marine Department. He has embarked on numerous major projects, including developing the department's first strategic plan; updating the City department's open space plan, which was last completed in 1973; completed the first new major park in the city in many years; and completing numerous capital projects, like skate parks, athletic complexes, dog parks, launch ramps, aquatic facilities, etc. He oversaw the financing, planning and development of the Skylinks Golf Course, which helped continue the status as having the busiest golf course system in the United States. The rebuild of the Downtown Marina contributed to the department being recognized as having the largest public marina system in the United States.

The Department once again won the prestigious Gold Medal in 2002 and 2006, for professional management from the National Recreation and Park Association as the top parks and recreation agency in the United States. During his tenure as Director, the number of parks in Long Beach doubled to where the City currently has over 170 parks. Also, 1,000 acres of new open space were dedicated as parks, trails, wetlands, etc. while he was Director. Much of his efforts were dedicated to adding parks, facilities, and programs to residents in the underserved central, west, and north Long Beach areas.

Mr. Hester has written numerous articles pertaining to parks and recreation issues on "Contract Maintenance" and "Revenue Generation in Parks." He has also been a featured speaker at numerous gatherings of parks and recreation professionals.

Among Mr. Hester's many awards and honors are the Governor's Award of Excellence of the State of Virginia, the National Association of Counties Management of Excellence Award, and numerous others. He has been active with the California Park and Recreation Society, serving as President of the Park Operations Section. He has served on a number of committees and boards of the National Recreation and Park Association. Mr. Hester is a member of the prestigious American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration.

On a local level, he is a Board member of the Long Beach Conservation Corps, Campfire USA, Run Racing, Inc. (who operate the Long Beach Marathon), Sea Festival Association, and others.