

# BROOKLYN PARK: GOLD MEDAL WINNER

"It used to be that a park got what was left over from a city's budget. Today, that is not always true. People are demanding more and better athletic complexes all the time."

With that statement, Lloyd Olsen, park superintendent at Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, expresses the commitment that the city administration has made to supply residents with a quality park system.

Olsen is starting his twelfth year as superintendent for Brooklyn Park. When he first came to the city in 1967, it had 100 acres of park land, two buildings, and hardly any equipment. Now, the city has 881 acres of parks and enough equipment to complete a park once the rough grading is done.

Brooklyn Park is just northwest of Minneapolis. One thing the city does not do over the 27 square miles it occupies, is sprawl. Brooklyn Park is being copied around the United States for its planned community development. The park system is a prime example.

The city has 881 acres of parks for its 40,000 residents. This meets minimum standards set by the National Recreation and Parks Association. Brooklyn Park will reach a popu-

lation of 120,000 according to Director of Parks and Recreation, Dennis Palm. By that time, he plans to have 2,000 acres of park developed for the residents.

Brooklyn Park passed a \$600,000 bond issue in 1967. With part of that backing them, they applied for a federal grant, received nearly \$300,000, and bought a par three golf course and quite a few other pieces of park land around the city.

In 1972, residents passed another bond issue for \$200,000. Olsen states, "Through those two bond issues, we've been able to apply for various federal and state grants and we've managed to turn that money into more than two million dollars worth of acquisition and development. "We've made the bond issue work for us." The city also has a clause requiring a developer to turn 10% of the land he is developing, or an equal amount of money, over to the city parks department.

Brooklyn Park has twenty-eight developed parks. They range in size from one acre to more than a hundred. "We refer to anything over 25 acres as a community park," says Olsen. "Anything under that is a neighborhood park.

"Neighborhood parks will normally have a warming house, playground equipment, hockey rink, skating rink and one or two ball fields, depending upon its size. What we try to do is put a park within walking distance of every child in the developed areas."

Palm's and Olsen's efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 1967, the Parks and Recreation Department received the National Gold Medal Award from the National Sports Foundation, the highest such award given. They have put the finishing touches on their new acquisitions and are applying for the award again this year.

The parks are popular with the residents. This summer, they were the scene of over 4000 softball games. And, the park staff drags every field before every game!

Olsen has a full time staff of eight. This summer he built up to 33 people. He is planning to keep 12 through this winter. "We get a lot of college students," he says. "I've been fortunate in that I get some who come back throughout college. They know the ropes. That's one thing wrong with part-time people. You get somebody green and by the time you get him trained, he's ready to go back to school."

All park construction and maintenance, except heavy grading is performed by the maintenance staff. Equipment includes 7 tractors, 3 rotary mowers, 2 self-propelled mowers, 14 trucks and 4 pick-up trucks, plus all the other equipment it takes to maintain quality turf and trees.

River Park, for example, has twenty-six acres along the Mississippi River and its major use is as a picnic facility in the summer. It has two softball fields and a skating rink for winter. All of the parks have playground equipment. River Park is known to the kids as "Rocket Park" because of a very large slide that has the steps in the shape of a rocket.

Another park that Olsen says is maintained strictly for picnics has playground equipment spread throughout the area to distribute the wear. There are also some ponds



Department found an artesian well that supplies steady water.

## Brooklyn Park

that they dredged for children to swim in.

The parks are well landscaped as evidenced by the many varieties of trees. The Parks Department has three tree nurseries located throughout the city totaling about 55 acres. Species in the nursery include ash, maple, hackberry, linden, and some oaks. Olsen estimated that, two years ago, he had \$150,000 worth of young trees in the nurseries. He doesn't transplant the trees until they reach about a 4-inch diameter. Other-

wise, kids damage them when they play around them.

The Parks Department has saved money in developing the parks by using the city engineering department. "When we talked to consulting engineers for planning the parks system and found out how much they wanted to do it, we decided to see if maybe we could just as well use our own engineering department," Olsen says. "It's worked out very well. We've managed to stretch our money a long way by doing our own planning end of it, having the engi-

neering staff draw the grade plans and so forth."

The Parks Department has qualified management. Director Palm graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1963 with a Master's Degree in Parks and Recreation Administration. He accepted the position in Brooklyn Park in 1965. His position involves development of policies, programs, and facilities to meet the city's needs.

Assistant Director Steve Roe graduated from the University of Minnesota also, in 1973, with a Bachelor's degree in Parks and Recreation Administration. His responsibilities include planning, evaluating, and overseeing all phases of the recreation programs.

Recreation programs include soccer. The season is just winding up. When hockey comes into season, the department will maintain 42 skating rinks.

Winter kill is a major problem when you get that far north. "I try to take my grass into the winter just as healthy as I can," stresses Olsen. He fertilizes the park turf in spring and fall. "We take soil samples and send them to the University of Minnesota for analysis. Then we apply what they recommend."

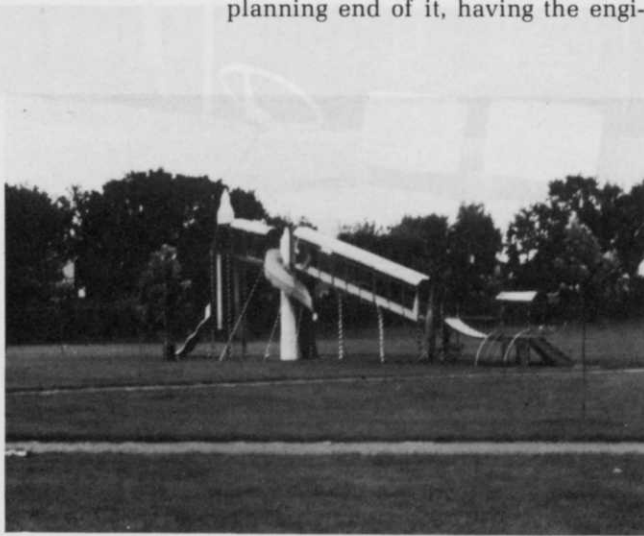
"I also work on the basis that if I keep my grass healthy and cut it right, I won't get a big disease problem." The Parks Department does not follow a preventative disease program, but it does spray if disease becomes a problem. Trees are watched closely for any symptoms. An outbreak of Dutch Elm disease is anticipated with a sanitation program.

The golf course is irrigated. The rest of the park area receives enough rainfall. This year rainfall has been especially abundant.

Olsen is treasurer of the Minnesota Park Supervisors Association. The association has been active in the state for the past one and one-half years. "It has been our hope through this organization, to professionalize our work," Olsen states. He feels that the association has filled a void, allowing park supervisors now to share their knowledge in solving common problems.

Utilizing available resources to the fullest in a program of planned development has worked for the Brooklyn Park Recreation and Parks Department.

Ron Morris



This piece of playground equipment has changed the name of River Park. The slide in "Rocket Park" is popular among the younger residents of Brooklyn Park.



The Parks Department has purchased this farm and will return it to its "turn-of-the-century" state.