

No jock talk from city's new recreation director

by TOM NIXON
Citizen Staff Reporter

John Furlong talks like a modern merchandising executive.

He uses the word "deliver" often and talks about packages, programs and public acceptance. Nothing out of the ordinary for a supermarket manager.

But Furlong is no such thing.

He's Prince George's new recreation director and might be expected to talk a bit more like a sports jock.

With a background in international sport, the young Irishman is an athlete but he has a strong talent for public relations and a university degree in recreation management.

Furlong, 26, is a native of Dublin, who's played for the Irish national basketball

team, coached the women's national team and played team handball, soccer and volleyball internationally, for his homeland.

There's little danger of the recreation department here becoming more sport-oriented than it already is, however, because Furlong puts a great emphasis on development of an all-round recreation program.

"Sports and fitness groups are very well-organized," he says, "so there's a tendency for them to overpower the cultural-type interests."

"The department has to maintain a middle-of-the-road approach and try to cater to all interests."

"We have to be fair and watch that the library and arts and crafts get their share, too."

The new recreation boss



FURLONG

says Prince George has better conditions for recreation than most communities and much better policies toward "delivering" recreation than Great Britain.

He said, in an interview, that British and Irish governments favor giant sports complexes where everything is offered under one roof and people have to pay to get in.

"Here the emphasis is on proper programming where the government pays much of the cost," he said.

"I think that's a better way."

Furlong is full of praise for the city's recreation opportunities. He said the facilities the city has developed are far better than local people appreciate.

He also has high praise for the people in the recreation department.

"We should be able to deliver a heck of a program," he said. "Everyone in the department is very concerned about delivering recreation — for giving people what they want and deciding how to get it to them."

"I think the program here has been very effective. The people are highly-qualified and dedicated to the job."

John Furlong first came to Canada in 1969 and after

a year at Burns Lake came to Prince George College where he was a math and physical education teacher. He returned to Ireland in 1972 for more study on recreation management.

He managed a government sports centre and after getting the experience he was after he was "glad to come back to Canada."

"I really didn't think sports centres were the right way to offer recreation," he said.

Rather than arrange programs and then sell them to the public, Furlong thinks the program should be the result of public demand.

"The community recreation associations should be the leaders telling the department what the community wants. The recreation co-ordinators are doing

a good job with recreation groups throughout the city."

There are 12 community associations in the city which work with department co-ordinators to arrange programs for the various community centres. Some of the groups originated from recreation commissions that served areas like the North Nechako and Vanway before the city was enlarged in 1975. Others, like the Duchess Park group, began later.

"I'm very concerned about public relations," Furlong insists. "That's what this is all about. I want people to get to know us, to come in and talk."

"One thing Matt Briggs (the former recreation director, now retired) said that I really agree with is

that public relations is most important.

"I want to open the door to people so we can provide them with what they want, not what we want."

He says that although the recreation program here has been effective the increase in the city's population puts a constant pressure on to be even more effective.

"You'll always get dissatisfaction and you always feel the need for more facilities but Prince George has its fair share of world-class athletes and it wouldn't have gotten them without facilities and good programs," Furlong says.

"We've produced Jim Fowles (swimming), and Sid McKnight (boxing) and we're going to produce many more."

PRISON RELEASE PROGRAM

Activators on emotional tightrope

by JOHN POPE
Citizen Staff Reporter

Bootleggers, drug pushers and the dependent psychological bonds of prison living are some of the problems facing Lynn Fitzpatrick.

As director of the Prince George Activator Centre, Fitzpatrick and his six-member staff must deal with these problems every day helping inmates on work release programs integrate themselves back into society.

And in doing so they have to walk an emotional tight-rope stretched between a need to have personal relationships with inmates or their friends and the requirements imposed by the correctional system.

On a day-to-day level this means they must be humane to "street" people visiting the centre, yet see they don't interfere with the rehabilitation process.

Which isn't the easiest thing to do since many street people have personal habits not conducive to maintaining strict rules in the centre prohibiting drugs, alcohol and sexual contact with the opposite sex.

"A lot of them don't even know people here," explained Fitzpatrick. "But they visit the centre because they don't have anywhere else to go."

"So they come in there smelling bad, with rampant staph infections and both eyes swollen shut because they've been beaten up," said Fitzpatrick.

"Yet the kind of person (counsellor) who could kick them out would be too vicious and cold-blooded to work here, so we sometimes have an impossible conflict."

And while dealing with problems in the centre, the



Activator director Lynn Fitzpatrick shows inmate good cooking technique.

Activator staff are also required to know where the 25-30 inmates in the program are at all times.

Although two correctional officers from the regional correctional centre assist in working with the police and employers when an inmate is on a work release, the key to the program's success is often the personal relationship that exists between staff and inmates.

"Most of the internal controls are personal," said Fitzpatrick. "Like I won't bring booze in because I have a personal commitment to the person working."

"But when someone knocks on your window with a cardboard box of booze asking what you would like . . . it's just a bit too much."

Most inmates are able to adjust to the temptations and only about 18 per cent are sent back to jail before their work release programs have been completed.

Fitzpatrick says the average length for inmates is three months, although some people have been allowed to stay longer if they pay for their room and board.

Some inmates find they need extra time to adjust to life outside prison.

And the staff help them with this by teaching them to be self-sufficient.

One method for this is in the handling of the food allowance.

Although food could be provided cheaply if it was cooked for them, inmates are instead given a \$5 food allowance daily so they can budget properly and prepare their own meals in a kitchen at the centre.

Since an inmate's pay check

is sent back to the correctional centre while he is working, an inmate must save money by cooking his own meals if he is to have enough money for other necessities.

Inmates in the program are also encouraged to take part in camping, fishing and other outdoor activities planned at the centre.

In addition to servicing inmates from the federal and provincial correctional system, the centre also provides short-term housing for federal inmates on day parole and others from the detoxification centre.

About 40 per cent of the inmates in the work release

program are from the Prince George Correctional Centre, with another 35 per cent coming from the federal penitentiary system.



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