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Andy Honker oral history interview by Andrew Huse, February 10, 2005

H. Andrew Honker (Interviewee)

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USF Florida Studies Center
Oral History Program
USF 50th History Anniversary Project

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Current Position: Retired, Formerly
Head of Campus Recreation
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Honker came to USF in 1969 as a resident instructor.

Background

Mr. Honker earned a bachelor's degree in recreation at Penn State University, then completed his master's in the same field at the University of Illinois. Following graduation, he spent three years in the public recreation and parks fields in New York and Virginia.

Resident instructor at USF

Mr. Honker came to USF through Ray King, who was then serving as the director of housing. In addition to supervising two residence halls, Zeta and Eta, his position required working with the recreation and intramural programs. He lived on campus for nearly two years during this period.

Physical education courses

While serving as resident instructor, Mr. Honker also taught courses in physical education and continued to work with intramurals and recreation. "For me it was ... a combination of teaching and practical education ... and that was attractive. That was ... probably the main reason I came."

Interaction with students; student involvement

As resident instructor, Mr. Honker recalls a time of student activism and protests against the Vietnam War. On one occasion, he remembers that materials inside a dumpster were set on fire near one of the residence halls. "Nothing too radical that I remember." "People would set fire alarms off in non-emergencies, and the residence halls would empty and that was always fun, too." His sons, two and four years old at the time, used to ride their tricycles around campus, and many of the students came to recognize and know them by name. "It was fun." At the time, there was "quite a heavy participation" of campus residents in intramural athletic programs.

Impressions of campus and programs

“The campus was fairly new ... lot of sandy areas ... an attractive place starting to grow ... Kind of an attractive location ... because of the opportunities to sort of create programs, [and] create traditions.”

Riverfront Park

At the time of his arrival, Mr. Honker recalls that Riverfront Park was “fairly primitive” and prone to flooding. “A lot of the facilities that are there now were not there. When we had canoes for rent, we took them down there on a trailer ... There were picnic tables, but there was no picnic pavilion.” When the construction of a bypass canal in later years, flooding was controlled and they were able to make significant improvements to the park. “The major improvements came when they widened Fletcher Avenue ... The County Parks Department along with the university did most of the improvements there,” including pavilions, restrooms, and a boathouse. Mr. Honker believes this occurred sometime in the late 1970s.

River Riot

River Riot was organized at that time largely through student organizations and the University Center, as he remembers. “It was kind of a Woodstock kind of event. It was sort of a carry-over from the sixties in a way.” Beginning in the early seventies, Mr. Honker does not believe that the River Riot lasted for too many years. “They had bands and a lot of people. The major problem was that the park really couldn’t accommodate the parking ... Most of the people had to park up along Fletcher,” which was only two-lanes at the time. “The park didn’t really have the facilities at that time certainly for that scale of event.”

Physical Education, Recreation, and Athletics

In 1971, Mr. Honker left his resident instructor position and made the transfer to Physical Education, Recreation, and Athletics, where he worked under Dick Bowers. He became an assistant professor in 1971 with a full-time position in the department. “That staff in the recreation side was pretty small ... At that time, actually, everyone that was working in either recreation or athletics was teaching. All the original coaches were teaching part time.” In 1972 Honker essentially became the director of the recreation program at USF.

As the programs grew, athletics and recreation became separate entities unto themselves, while physical education formally joined the College of Education.

Student drug use

Mr. Honker remembers little about recreational drug use among students at that time. “I never had any direct experience with cases of [drug use] in the two years I was in the residence halls.”

Staff involvement in intramural sports

In certain intramural sports, Mr. Honker recalls that there were “Some faculty and staff teams – and there still are.” In particular, the faculty and staff participated in such sports as touch football, basketball, and softball. “Participation in terms of the number of

students on campus and enrolled at that time was pretty high ... Facilities were very good for that time, particularly outdoor facilities.”

Competition for space and facilities

Mr. Honker believes that the gymnasium opened before he came to USF, sometime around 1966 or 1967. Prior to that, physical education classes were taught primarily outdoors. When the USF men’s basketball team began in earnest, the physical education and recreation programs had to compete for limited space and facilities. “At the time ... we had athletic teams using the gym and intramural teams using the gym and classes using the gym, the scheduling was very tight ... A lot of the intramural activities at that point were outside.”

Decision to remain at USF

The people in the physical recreation and education programs, Mr. Honkers recalls, “were very good to work with right from the start.” The opportunities for growth were appealing, and “of course the climate was hard to beat.” As a result, he decided it was “a good time just to stay around” and raise a family.

Increasing demands from university and community

As head of recreation, he recalls that, “The biggest challenges were trying to accommodate the demand with the available space. The scheduling was an issue. We also started getting increased demand for community events.” For example USF hosted the statewide Special Olympics for “quite a number of years,” in addition to other community-based activities.

Reliance on student employees

Because the program had only three full-time professional positions at the time, they relied upon university students serving as supervisors and lifeguards, among other facilities positions. “There were twenty-three or twenty-four full-time people, and about two-hundred student employees in campus recreation.” Facility growth was also one of the greatest challenges, as the department worked to meet increasing demands from the university as well as the community. “Student employees did, and still do, very responsible work ... We probably had students doing things that full-time people were doing at other universities.” “One of the most rewarding things over the time has been to see those student workers and know how much they gained from working in those positions. And then having them come back years later. We’ve had a lot of them out in the field actually.”

Physical growth

As the respective athletic programs grew, it became increasingly difficult to share limited spaces, facilities, and resources on campus. While the construction of the Sun Dome in the late seventies and early eighties helped to alleviate some of those concerns, it became a venue for concerts and other additional events. “As they got busier ... it became very hard to use those [facilities].” There was also pressure for fitness, conditioning, and weight training facilities as well. “It became a challenge to get funding to do that.” In the late eighties and early nineties, an auxiliary gym was constructed at the Sun Dome, and

the Recreation Center was expanded to meet increased demands. Despite such growth, Honker comments, “There’s still a need for more.”

Shifting emphases

One of the major changes in athletics and recreation over the years has been a shift in focus from team or group activities to individual initiatives, which accommodate various schedules and demands. Aware of this trend, Mr. Honker asked in the late seventies that the program name be changed from recreational sports to campus recreation. “A large amount of what’s being done is not ‘sports’ in the traditional sense,” but more individually focused activity and recreation. “And I think that’s been very common” nationally.

In the nineties, Mr. Honker was pressed more and more by administrative duties at the university. As part of the growth and delineation of separate departments, the responsibilities for maintenance and facilities management fell under those respective programs. A new building was constructed in 1995, allowing for further growth and development.

Current agenda

Currently, Honker explains that Campus Recreation is still looking at expansion needs, and hopes to gain more space and additional facilities in the coming years. Riverfront Park continues to undergo changes and revisions. “It’s hard to know exactly what expectations are going to be and what students are going to want ... The more resident students there are ... the more demand there will be ... That’ll always be a challenge, trying to keep up.”

Memories

One of the most difficult projects in Honker’s tenure at USF was securing funding for the construction of the new recreation center in the mid-nineties. “That was kind of a tough time there.” On the other hand, one of his fondest memories is the completion and opening of that facility in 1995.

End of Interview