

KENNEDY GROVE AND BRIONES REGIONAL PARK DEDICATION CEREMONIES
Sunday, October 22, 1967

By: Senator George Miller, Jr.

"A RED LETTER DAY"

Thank you, Irwin . . . ladies and gentlemen. First and of utmost importance there is no substitute for good music. It was great!

In the 21 years that I have been your elected representative in the State Legislature this is the first time that I have participated in the dedication of a park. We have dedicated a lot of monstrous freeways. We have dedicated some mighty ugly bridges; again, some monstrous buildings. This is the first time . . . perhaps I have been traveling with the wrong crowd, but I attempt to point out and to point up that, with all the other things we do with the other things that man can make and man can create and do, we spend so little time and so comparatively few dollars attempting to utilize and maintain that which God made.

Also, I find a real joy in coming to a park and onto park land that is created for the user, so that the fellow who pays the bills can have an important share in its use and its joy. So very often, when dedicated people get involved in park sites, recreation sites, they tend to, and we have seen this in the State Park Department over a long period of time, when they become so interested in acquiring sites that they forget that they should set aside some money so that people can use these sites. Over half of the State park lands in the State of California today, I am ashamed to say, have "keep out" signs on them.

You know for many years we were involved in what I have attempted to term is a miser's theory of recreation. You take all of the money that you have and use that to acquire land so that somebody else won't get it. But, in the meantime you don't develop it because you take next year's developmental land and then you go out and acquire more. Obviously, we must acquire the best site as we can. But at the same time we owe a little more than that, considerably more than that, in fact, to the people who are paying the bills and to today's people - to the family that want to take their children out to use the park. Ordinarily, a speaker gets kind of pushed out of shape when there are kids running around and not paying any attention to his pearls of wisdom. I'm real happy to see these kids using this park. This is what the park is for.

I think that we can certainly say that Irwin Luckman and his predecessor Bill Mott, Dick Trudeau, others on the staff - with the enthusiasm and the dedication that all of them exhibit - have made the East Bay Regional Park District the outstanding example of successful accomplishment that it is today. I am happy that I may have been of some little bit of assistance to them.

Fifteen years ago, we set out in Contra Costa County to develop a County park system modeled generally on that which already existed in Alameda County, because of the Regional Park District. Unfortunately, most of those 15 years were years of frustration and problems, with action after action . . . bond issue or "pay-as-you-go" . . . failing to produce a single useable County park. During those frustrating years we were fortunate that Tilden, Redwood, Lake Temescal, Lake Chabot, Cull Canyon, Sunol and the other Regional Parks were nearby - and I can say as Contra Costans we made good use of them.

Then we got a second chance! Spearheaded by the County Grand Jury, the Taxpayers Association, the League of Women Voters, the Park and Recreation Council and Commission - and with the enthusiastic backing of many other groups and citizens - we voted to join the Regional Park District in the 1964 election. Significantly, we also voted to tax ourselves to make parks in Contra Costa County possible.

Perhaps the importance of this annexation vote was best expressed by an editorial in one of our leading daily newspapers. The editorial said:

"The big winners on June 2nd were the people of Contra Costa County. Preservation of some of the County's most beautiful areas has been assured by the voters' decision. This means that rolling hills, lakes, trees will be held in trust for the enjoyment of all the people. They will be developed and managed for the people by the operators of one of the finest systems of Regional Parks in the country."

"There was much talk of a 'grass roots' movement. If ever there was truly a 'grass roots' movement, it was the campaign for the approval of Park District annexation. Housewives, children, business and political leaders joined the fight . . . together with over 60 organizations, public and private. Tuesday was a red letter day in this County's history."

Today also is a red letter day for Contra Costa County!

"Pleasure may come as an illusion," as one well known writer put it, "but happiness can only come of reality." And today, as we dedicate the beautiful Kennedy Grove Regional Recreation Area and Briones Regional Park, we are indeed experiencing a reality.

Nor has the future ever looked brighter. By the 1970's Kennedy Grove and Briones will be joined by other partially or fully developed Regional Parks. Las Trampas, Brooks Island, John Marsh Home, Contra Loma, Kellogg, Arroyo del Cerro, Wildcat Canyon, and probably others will be synonymous with "open space" and "recreation".

Now I know there are still some negative characters around - and there probably always will be some - you know these people who have a logical reason for being against everything . . . much like the fellow who tried to tell his wife that if nature had intended her to have a fur coat, it would have given her one.

Any any rate, we've come a long, long way both locally and nationally in our understanding of the need for recreation and parks and in both citizen and legislative support of the entire conservation movement.

Basically, I believe we do have a real national awareness and my failure to refer to President John Kennedy is intentional, because Assemblyman John Knox is going to touch on the President and his influence on recreation, wild life, the physical life, fishing, etc. But, I think we have a real national awareness from the voters, to the Legislature, to Congress, to the Secretary of the Interior, to the President, that we can no longer treat conservation as we did some 65 years ago - as a secondary concern. Both nationally and locally we have the realization that parks, beauty and the need for leisure time and the ability to use it well - the privacy of open space - these are not luxuries, the desert we might skip at the end of a rich meal. Instead, in my humble opinion, they are necessities if there is to be quality in our lives and if we are able to build a physically and mentally healthy nation.

California is now the most populous State in the nation. Every politician mentions it. I'm not sure that's good, but we always mention it. Last year the population of this State was increased by some 600,000 persons and the forecasters tell us that we have every reason to believe that this growth will continue. Here in the Bay Area we are an important part of our State's explosive growth. In Contra Costa County it is predicted that we will have a population of one million persons twenty years from now.

We all take some pleasure and pride in this growth. But I think we must remember that it is a mixed blessing, for with it come a multiplicity of human problems.

As our suburbs mushroom around us, as our residential areas become more crowded, so do the problems multiply also in direct proportion. And bigness will bring down upon our heads only a dismal, universal hiss, the sound of public scorn, unless we can meet the challenges that it brings with it.

In practical terms what does this mean to the Directors and to the staff of the Regional Park District, to those here this afternoon, and to others who are likewise concerned about "open space" and about beauty.

Increased interest in open space and conservation and increased use of expanding Regional Park facilities are certain to bring with them additional problems. You cannot - nor will the public let you - live on past or present accomplishments. Rather you must prepare to move at a greatly accelerated pace if you expect to keep up with the growing demand for more open space and recreational facilities.

The job of park management is more complex now than it was prior to World War II. And it will become more complex and laced with problems in the future. My good friend, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, put it succinctly in his book, "The Quiet Crisis," when he said, "Park men are being challenged by excellence. They must be ambassadors of aesthetics, good land use, and of national conservation attitudes."

Specifically, to the Directors and staff, I hope you will keep these points in mind as guide-lines in your future operations:

First, you can increase recreational opportunities for all. Too many parks - not only here but all over the country - are available only to the car-owning public. There are still plenty of people who don't own cars and use public transportation. Let us not forget that it was a dispute over using a fire hydrant for recreation that set off the 1966 summer riots in Chicago.

Secondly, I think you can provide more opportunities for active recreation. The need for physical activity is increasingly recognized as essential for everyone. The average American will swim and golf, and even take a hike, or ride a bicycle. But I think we must remember, too, that if there is no open space or recreation amid dense populations the "sports" can sometimes become pretty deadly.

Third, you can search for new approaches and ideas. Open land will be increasingly difficult to acquire as time goes on. Thus you must continue to use your imagination and be willing to experiment. Canals such as those of the Contra Costa County Water District - even power line easements and rights-of-way or abandoned railroad lines - may have some use as trails.

Fourth, you can promote parks for increased mid-week and even winter use. Summer isn't the only time parks should be in use. They are there twelve months of the year. With ingenuity and promotion you can get the public to use the facilities twelve months of the year also.

Fifth, I think you must share your "know-how" with others in the Bay Area. The Regional Park District has won many honors and been admiringly inspected by park leaders from many other countries. I understand they've been here from Australia, Canada, Egypt, France, Mexico and a myriad of other places. The other counties in our Bay Area can certainly use the "know-how" and experience that has been gained by this District. Until regional government is formalized, and it will come to pass, when your skills will be integrated into the whole, I think those skills must be made available to others so that the entire Bay Area will be a better place in which to live, to work, and to play.

I'm sure that some of you out there are saying these are great principles. "But doesn't he realize that they cost money and they also take time." No one realizes better than I, that these things cost money. But also no one, I hope no one, realizes better than I, that to not do them costs even more. Even directly in terms of tax dollars, but certainly more so in terms of human values and a meeting of human needs. I think in a way "being for conservation", may have become a bit like being for motherhood and against sin. However, when it gets right down to it, it's the price tag which separates the men from the boys.

Those of us - both legislators and citizens - who place a heavy premium on good schools for our children, or clean air to breathe, on parks and recreation, and on the conservation of natural beauty, I am sure, are willing to pay this price.

I thank you very much for being nice enough to invite me here today. I haven't seen much of this park. What I do see I like - and I know those of you who know much more about it than I, like it. I hope we'll all enjoy it together.

Thank you very kindly.