

Tapply-Thompson Community Center Celebrates 75 Years!

In our beloved town of Bristol, something we cherish and have cherished for years is the history of our town, and one of the main pillars of our community is the Tapply Thompson Community Center. Some of us may have volunteered there or participated in the numerous activities and clubs. Others may have simply visited for the annual Santa's Village or relied on the Summer Camp program for their children. Bottom line, the T.T.C.C. has supported many in our town and is now marking 75 years of offering a sense of community to Bristol.

One of the biggest contributors to the Center is Les Dion. Les grew up with the Center as a place she could go to hang out and participate in activities, and is now working there as the Director of Recreation.

“As a teenager, the then Bristol Community Center was the place to go to hang out with friends, attend dances and participate in activities. I could never have imagined then how important the now Tapply-Thompson Community Center would become for me. Working in this beloved and historic building and program has taught me so many important life lessons and I am so grateful to be a part of the history. There are countless people, both past and present, that have made the Center what it is today. They all believed in the importance of community recreation and having a place that kids and adults could call their ‘home away from home’,” Les stated when asked for her opinion on what the Center means to the community. “I am honored to

work with an amazing staff to continue the many traditions that have been a part of the Center programs from its beginnings.”

Of course, there was a time in Bristol when there weren't many options for the youth of the community to turn to regarding social clubs and organizations.

In the mid-1920s, a man named Rev. A. Brownlow Thompson came to Bristol as minister for the then Methodist Church. He noticed that, while there were many creative and social opportunities for adults, the same didn't exist for kids. Along with maintaining his responsibilities as minister, Rev. Thompson founded a boys' club that attracted many members. Still unsatisfied, he envisioned and proposed a central meeting place for the youth. Alas, he was shut down seeing as many didn't view it as necessary and it wasn't like any other town had established such a place. In 1935, Rev. Thompson left Bristol with the formation of the Federated Church, and when he returned in 1942, it was apparent that youth activity had declined. He worked to bring back and increase youth involvement, and by 1946 Thompson's goal had been reached. The Federated Committee had finally decided to sign for the expenses of a full-time director, and filling that position would be a former member of the Reverend's boys' club, Richard Tapply.

Richard “Wink” Tapply is well-known in our town for being the Community Center's first-ever director. Assuming the role of apprentice under Rev. Thompson, he learned how to guide and administer while following their philosophy, “If one young

adult life is influenced for the good, it is money well spent,” as noted in *History of the Bristol Community Center* written by Charles E. Greenwood.

While it was difficult at times to earn public support, Tapply was determined to create a center where children could participate in meaningful activities that would later contribute to their future. And that he did.

Mr. Tapply’s son, Richard Tapply, assumed an active role in the Community Center during his youth, and has maintained that role by participating in Center-run events, and keeping his ties with the Bristol community. After interviewing Mr. Tapply we were provided with a greater insight into the center’s impact on the community and how today’s youth can be driven to continue and improve that influence.

“Rev. A.B. Thompson’s influence on my father and consequently my dad’s influence on the youth of Bristol, including myself, came from a real strong belief by the Reverend that recreational activities for young people was critically important to their spiritual, social, and athletic upbringing. It wasn’t just the youth that was involved, but families were actively engaged and involved in all of the events, activities, and programs that were offered,” Mr. Tapply stated when asked about the center’s impact on the community. “There was just such a variety of activities coming out of the community center that if you weren’t interested in one, you were certainly interested in another. The community center was a hub of activity [24/7](#) for both kids and adults. This is where people were able to socialize and spend time together.”

We also asked Richard Tapply his opinion on how to inspire today's youth to be just as influential and impactful on the community as his father and the Reverend were.

"We often hear that what we did back in those days would never work now because kids are different. My dad would get so upset when he heard that, because he believed that kids aren't different. The fundamental needs of youth are timeless.

They need opportunities to feel good about themselves, they need opportunities for recognition, they need opportunities to go to healthy, social, and wholesome events, and they need opportunities to explore the things that they might love to do. Those things haven't changed."

Concluding our interview with Mr. Tapply, we asked if he thought that the T.T.C.C. today meets the expectations and hopes that the founders had originally envisioned. In his response, he expressed pride and gratification.

"By the time my dad left, the T.T.C.C. was considered to be a model for small-town recreation. Throughout the United States, people wanted to know what was happening in Bristol, N.H. and their community center activities, because of the innovativeness, the creativeness of it, and the involvement of the entire community. I think that the T.T.C.C. today is doing just that as well. They are doing an incredibly good job of involving the community. As a Tapply, I am very, very proud of what the community center continues to do and the job that Les and Dan and the entire board has done to provide for the people and the youth of the community."