

In the last article regarding the T.T.C.C.'s 75th anniversary, we looked at the first 25 years and what was accomplished during that time. The center was established as a place that invited members of the community to participate in recreational social events and activities. In just a quarter of a century, 30+ activities became available for the public to enjoy. Annual events and holiday celebrations brought the community closer together and gave the town something to always look forward to. In the second 25 years of the Center's operation, this trend of incorporating more and more events and activities only grew, as the Center began to utilize Wells Field and make home improvements to the building itself.

For this article, we had the pleasure of talking with the first female director of the T.T.C.C., Merelise O'Connor. O'Connor was raised in Rhode Island single-handedly by her mother who worked as a P.E. teacher. In the household, her mother promoted equality among the six kids in her family. O'Connor was always involved in extracurricular activities and athletics, had been a camp counselor, and had worked in a saw mill during college, so running the Center didn't seem like it should be exclusively a "man's job". Having that philosophy, O'Connor became the Assistant Director until the Director job became vacant. When told that the Board would likely hire a man, she persevered instead of giving up. A few months later, they hired her and she dove into all of the challenges, from running activities in and outside the Center, to driving the bus, to teaching swimming, and to painting and maintaining the building itself. She also attended to the administrative side of the operation and took on fund-raising responsibilities.

As the first female director, one would assume O'Connor played an influential role in many young women's lives. When asked for her opinion on the matter, she expressed humility and gratitude towards her impact on that demographic. "I didn't take the job to be a feminist influence, I took the job because it was fun. Organizing those events and working with such amazing people was a great opportunity for me at that age. Because I grew up with the same opportunities as my brothers and sisters, I didn't really feel that running the Center should have a gender specific requirement. To work there felt normal, nothing out of the ordinary. I dedicated myself to doing a good job at the Center and if I ended up being seen as a role model for young girls along the way, then great."

O'Connor had a connection with the town of Bristol that many of us can relate to. Everyone in this community can recognize it as one that is small and tight-knit where we all know each other in some way or another. When reflecting on one of the biggest fundraisers for the Center, a dance she helped run at the New Hampton School, O'Connor relayed a very humorous story that really captures the sense of community that the town of Bristol exudes. "This was the annual and largest fundraiser for the Center, a spring dance in a large auditorium. We had planned ahead of time, but were starting to run out of certain types of liquor at the bar. Two prominent business leaders in the community left the party and returned with boxes of liquor. I thought they had raided someone's well stocked home bar, but it wasn't until later that I learned they had actually awakened the man who ran the state liquor store to stock up. They left a \$100 bill in the cash register (that someone's dad had

given him for high school graduation) until Monday morning when a proper payment was made. This was only something that could happen in a small, close-knit community like Bristol."

To finish our discussion with O'Connor, we asked her if she had any final comments she wanted to add. In her response, she discussed the progress the Center is currently making and her admiration for its founders, A.B. Thompson and Wink. "I'd just like to say that everyone at the Center is doing a great job. It's incredible to see the growth that is made every year and the changes that are made to fit the current times. When I was the director, communication was far more limited and we had to mimeograph what events would be happening at the Center to distribute at schools. Facebook and social media is making it easier for the Center to reach a far wider audience than ever before. I read your past two articles, and I just wanted to comment on Wink and A.B. Thompson's dedication to the dream that you wrote about earlier on. Reading those in the paper just brought back so many memories. The time and effort they put in to make their desire for a recreational center for the youth a reality is just so inspirational. And we can continue to see those that currently work with the Center are still pursuing that same goal. It's an incredible mission they started 75 years ago that is still being carried out today."

Taking everything into account, it is evident that the second 25 years of the Center's operation was just as successful and progressive as the first. By beginning to utilize Well's field and working on improvements on the building itself, the T.T.C.C. made

advancements that allowed it to expand and improve its vast program of activities. In our interview with the Center's first female director, Merelise O'Connor, we heard her opinion on the influence she had on the community and an amusing story that shed light on the true collectiveness of the citizens of Bristol. In the next article on the most recent 25 years of the T.T.C.C.'s operative, the trend of improving and advancing the range of activities, opportunities, and the building itself will continue.

-Cassie Zick