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**Tapply-Thompson Community Center – 76 years of Serving
the Newfound Region**

Written by Cassie Zick

Last time we looked at the T.T.C.C.'s 75th anniversary, we focused on its second 25 years as an operating recreational center. We were given the pleasure of talking to Merelise O'Connor, the Center's first female director. She elaborated upon the opportunities that using Wells Field provided, the expansion of the Center's range of activities, and modifications made to the building itself. For this final article, we talked with Les Dion, the current Director of Recreation, and gained insight into the Center's last 25 years, as well as her opinion on what the future could hold.

Les had been a participant at the community center throughout her childhood, and continued to stay involved into adulthood once her children came of age to take part in the many clubs and activities they offered. In the interview, Les explained how she eventually obtained her position as director. "One day, they needed someone to fill in at one of the summer camps. Beth Dever was the director at the time and she had asked me if I would work a couple of days at camp as an extra counselor. Then next Summer, I became director of that camp. I started working in afterschool too, and did summer camp for quite a few years for what is now "Project Streams." I became

the assistant director for Beth while she was still here in the early 90s, and when she moved on to a different position, I became the director in 1997.”

We then asked Les about improvements and changes the Center has made in the last 25 years. In her response, she mentioned programs that have been canceled, those that have been running since the beginning, and progressive changes the board has made to adapt with the times. “For many years, they had the Carnival Queen program. Highschool girls would give a speech about themselves and then one of them would get crowned Carnival Queen. That was a program that was started in Wink’s time, and it continued right up until about 15 years ago. We stopped doing that program because high school kids today are so busy. To try to get practices in and do a really good job of it was just getting tougher and tougher. They still seemed to really enjoy doing it but we just couldn’t pull it off anymore.” Les then began to mention programs that Wink Tapply started at the very beginning that are still prominent now, and modifications the board has made over the years.

“Santa’s Village is one of Wink’s programs that he started and that continues now. Last year we had to do it as a drive by, outside on North Main Street. Hopefully, this year, we will be back to normal again. Wink was also instrumental in getting both the Apple Festival and the Lobster Chicken Dinner going, which are two events that are still going on today. As far as activities go, they have evolved. One of the cool things about the Center is that the board is very progressive and knows that as things change, they are willing to change too. We still offer all of the original athletic activities, and have recently added the field hockey program as well as the track and

field program. We have begun collaborating with Operation W.A.R.M. as well, which is a program that provides kids with coats, boots, hats, and any other clothes they need to stay warm in the winter.”

When asked for her opinion on one of the more impressive advancements that the Center has made, Les talked about Wells Field, and the improvements the baseball & softball commission and volunteers have made to it. “When I started, they barely had any amenities at Wells Field although it was always a great field. Over the last 15-20 years we have built the concession stand, redid the fence, built a press box, put in a scoreboard, and built an irrigation system. To me, that’s probably one of our coolest accomplishments. We’ve come so far from a little field that was playable, to really a showcase of a field. We are pretty excited about the work that has been done out there. We have been very fortunate for our dedicated donors and volunteers that have made this possible.”

Looking towards the future, Les believes that the Center will continue to play a vital role in the community. “I think that the Center will continue to be a hub for youth activities, as well as adult activities too. We don’t put a lot of emphasis on our adult programs but we offer a good amount of them. I think that those activities will continue to evolve and grow as they have in recent years. In knowing the people that will be in charge, I believe that they’re progressive enough to know what needs to change. I am certain that the Center will continue to be a treasured part of the community and serve as a safe-haven for kids as it has always been.”

To end, Les talked about the support and prosperity the Center has been able to attract during its operation in the last 75 years. “We’ve had a lot of accomplishments. We were one of the first, if not the first, non-profit recreation department in the state. The model for this building and this program has been used throughout the country. Many recreational centers would even seek out Wink on how to get started themselves. The Center is just such a success story and so many people share a passion for it. Because of so much community spirit and the love for this program, we thrive. We’ve been so lucky. I see that we will continue to succeed for the next 25 years. I think that it is possible that we might add an additional building, as we’ve been talking about it for a while now. But I would hope that this building will always be the central spot for the Center. It’s just got such a rich history and everybody loves it. It’s been a really anticlimactic 75th due to the current circumstances, but I think that we will celebrate all of those years in a bunch of different fashions as things get back to normal.”

Submitted by Cassie Zick

Footnote: The four articles about the history of the Tapply-Thompson Community Center were part of an Extended Learning Opportunity (ELO) for Cassie Zick. Cassie is a student at NRHS and reviewed the TTCC history and interviewed a different person from each era of the history. We are very grateful for the many hours of work that Cassie put in on this project to capture our rich history. Les Dion

