



The American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation: Tracing Our Roots to 1939

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Even the “youngest” of AAHPERD’s national associations has a long history.

“A AALF/AALR Boards Vote ‘YES’” read the headline of the Fall 2004 issue of *Active Voice*, a special combined newsletter of the two associations that merged to form the American Association for Physical Activity and Recreation (AAPAR). The story opened, “August 23, 2004, was the date of one of the most historic votes in Alliance history. The boards of two of the six national associations voted to form a new organization.”

Thus, AAPAR was born in January 2005 from the American Association for Active Lifestyles and Fitness (AAALF) and the American Association for Leisure and Recreation (AALR). A year later, on January 27, 2006, AAPAR announced its launch with a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. As part of AAHPERD’s 125th anniversary celebration, this article will give a brief history of AAPAR and its predecessor associations, focusing primarily on the past 25 years.

What’s in a Name?

The birth of AAPAR was not easy. Some members opposed the decision. Also, the process proved taxing to those charged with making it happen. “Painful” was how AAPAR president Rick LaRue described spending a weekend in Nashville struggling with just what to *name* the new association—luckily for future marketers, the group eventually vetoed the unpronounceable Leisure, Recreation, Physical Activity and Fitness Association (LRPAF).

“We got a few other things decided,” LaRue said, “and we were able to organize our thinking. But two days is a long time to talk about a name!”

Nevertheless, LaRue also described the birthing process as rewarding:

So many people worked incredibly hard together to create AAPAR. Each of us brought ideas to the table and made compromises. Each of us struggled to ensure that the outcome of our work would be what is best for our members...often putting aside our personal choices. Such passion is rare and worthy of recognition.

Janet Seaman, AAALF/AAPAR executive director from 1994 to 2006, concurred saying, “Those involved had a good sense of business because of their sport management backgrounds or university administrative experience and expertise.”

The roots of AAALF stretch to 1949, when it was first called the General Division of what was then AAHPER (“Dance” was added in 1979). The General Division’s mission was to support the cross-disciplinary interests of the Alliance. Later, AAALF served nonschool professionals and the university faculty who trained them.

Created in 1974, AALR arose from the Recreation Division of 1939. It was dedicated to enhancing the quality of life through the promotion of creative and

meaningful leisure and recreation experiences. Its unique focus was leisure research and professional preparation. Figure 1 shows the development of these associations up to the creation of AAPAR.

Giving and Receiving

Despite the alphabet soup of acronyms, influential long-time members agree on one thing: Their careers have been enhanced through their involvement with AAPAR, its predecessors, and the Alliance. Here is what some had to say:

“The greatest benefit is the lifelong friends that I’ve made through my leadership, membership, and involvement,” Janet Seaman says. “As I became more known in my field, some members sought me out at conferences, whereas in the earlier stages of my career, I went to conferences to see the leaders of the time.”

Christine Tipps, AALR president from 2004 to 2005, says that as a result of the friendships she made during her involvement with AALR, she “was given the courage to make real changes in my life personally and to deal with issues and everyday problems differently.”

Like many others, Joel Meier, AALR president from 1978 to 1979 and president of AAHPERD from 1989 to 1990, credits his colleagues: “Several fellow leaders served as my role models and mentors. They motivated me to pursue bigger leadership responsibilities in the field, which helped me grow professionally.”

“The greatest benefit for me has been the opportunity to meet many of the profession leaders,” AAPAR president-elect Julia Ann Hypes says. “I don’t mean those with the big salaries and the high profile titles, but those who write the texts, consult on projects, and influence policy.”

A member since 1954, Julian Stein says his greatest benefit has been “the opportunities that couldn’t be gotten any other way, like staying in touch with what is happening in the



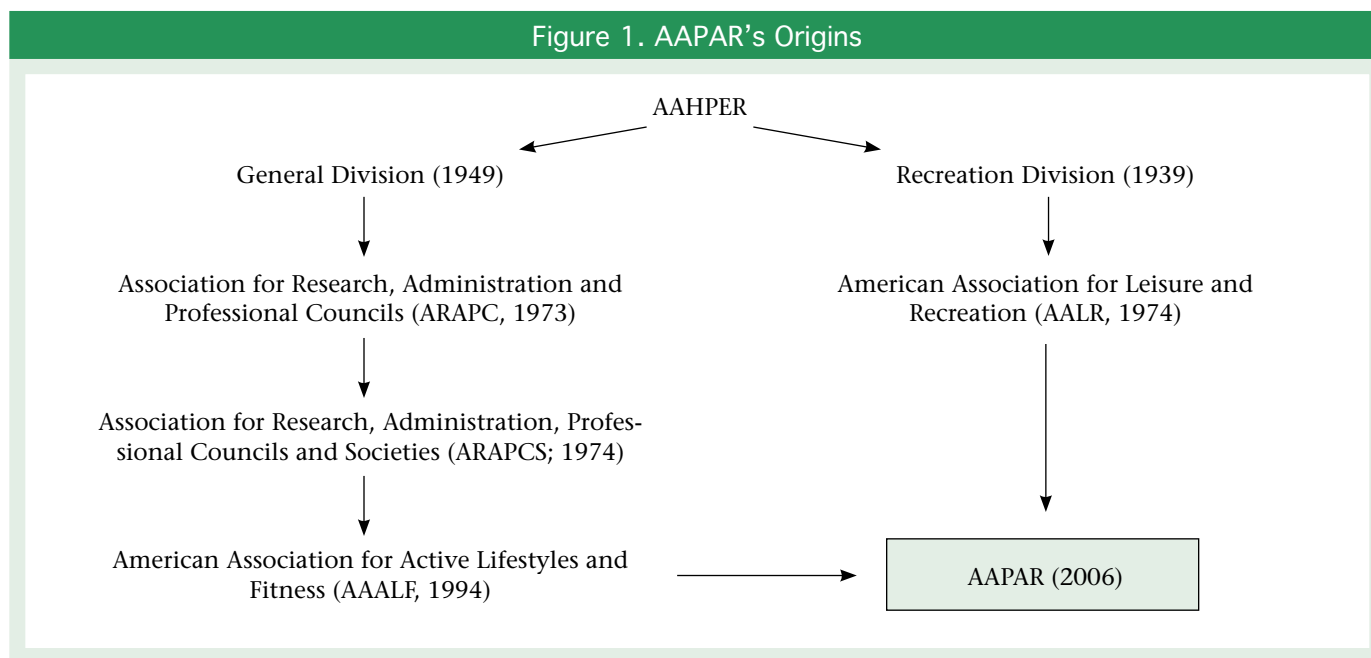
Announcing the birth of AAPAR at the National Press Club were (left to right) Janet Seaman, former AAPAR executive director; Judy Brookhiser, past AALR president; Juliette Rizzo, Ms. Wheelchair America 2005; Connie Fox, past AAPAR president; and Jeanni Wilson, Senior Olympian.

field, helping to bring about needed changes, and pushing for more emphasis on kids with disabilities.”

Championing the Need for Adapted Physical Education

One of AAPAR’s most active councils is the Adapted Physical Activity Council (APAC), the only organization of its kind serving adapted physical educators. In cooperation with the National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities, APAC developed the Adapted Physical Education National Standards exam, as well as a nonexamination option to become a certified adapted physical educator.

With the encouragement of Seaman and an AAPAR grant, Lauren Lieberman, then APAC chair-elect, put together a team to write *Paraeducators in Physical Education: A Training*





Mathew Cummiskey teaches a young swimmer during the adapted aquatics session at AAHPERD's 2008 National Convention in Fort Worth, Texas.

Guide to Roles & Responsibilities. According to Lieberman, the book is “the first effort to create a formal training for teachers’ aides in PE. There is absolutely no other training out there. This has had a significant impact on adapted physical education.”

The book was a natural progression from the achievement that came before it: the development of physical education programs for people with physical and developmental disabilities. Julian Stein, a driving force in adapted physical activity for more than 50 years, is considered by many to be the father of adapted physical education in the United States. In 1966 Stein came on board as AAHPERD's director of what was then called the Project on Recreation and Fitness for the Mentally Retarded, originally funded with a three-year grant from the Kennedy Foundation. From 1966 to 1981 he was the executive director and consultant for the Unit on Programs for the Handicapped. When the grant period ended, the Board of Governors voted to continue the program, hiring two staffers to expand it into what has become APAC. Stein counts that long-ago decision as having significantly advanced adapted physical education in this country.

Produced by AAPAR in cooperation with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Adapted Physical Education Assessment Scale was created in 1979. In 2008 Janet Seaman, along with AAPAR's first president, Connie Fox, and a team of experts, launched a second edition. Unique software now allows educators to determine which students qualify for special physical education services.

Advancing Outdoor Recreation

In addition to leading the way in adapted physical activity programs, early leaders also recognized the importance of outdoor recreation. Along with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), AALR created the National Council on Accreditation to accredit college and university programs that focused on meaningful leisure and recreation experiences. AAPAR is no longer involved, though the program still operates under NRPA. Some of AALR's other achievements

include the journal *Leisure Today*; an award for scholars who emulate J. B. Nash (former AAHPERD president and a leader in physical, health, and recreation education); and standards for playground design and safety, the precursor to AAPAR's recent development of *Play On! Playground Learning Activities for Your Fitness*. National Family Recreation Week, another popular AALR program, encouraged families to play together.

The Outdoor Education Project (OEP) was initiated in 1955 as the first professional organization to provide national leadership for outdoor education in its broadest sense. The OEP served as the forerunner to what is now AAPAR's Council for Adventure and Outdoor Education/Recreation (CAOER), which is known for such programs as “Teaching Adventure Skills in the Gym,” the “Paddle Safe, Paddle Smart” workshops, the biennial *Get Out!* Conferences, and the new National Highway Traffic Safety Administration grant to teach bicycle safety to youths.

Aging and Adult Development

Keeping active is a lifelong pursuit. AAPAR's current Council on Aging and Adult Development (CAAD) got its start in the Association for Research, Administration, Professional Councils, and Societies (ARAPCS), which arose from the General Division (see figure 1). Later, in cooperation with the National Senior Games Association, AAALF created the TESA (Training and Encouragement for Senior Activity) Project to promote physical activity among older adults. With two grants totaling \$458,245 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the workshop series (originally called Fitness Programs for Older Adults) provided nationwide workshops from 2001 to 2006. According to Seaman, the TESA grant “allowed us to deliver workshops directly to senior citizens rather than the professional development we normally provided. TESA was showing up in communities that had never heard of AAALF. Then people learned that important knowledge can be gained from the discipline of physical education, even at an advanced age.”

Councils: The Heart of AAPAR

AAPAR now boasts 12 councils (table 1). In addition to APAC, CAOER, and CAAD, the Council for Aquatic Professionals, for instance, offers one of only two adapted aquatics credentials in the country (the other is the YMCA). Forthcoming is an online certification to become an adapted aquatics specialist. More than 700 adapted aquatics assistants, instructors, and master teachers have been trained nationwide. Former Adapted Aquatics Committee Chair Monica Lepore, the lead author of the book *Adapted Aquatic Programming*, has been instrumental in recreating AAPAR's popular adapted aquatics credentialing workshop series. Sue Grosse created the original program in the early 1990s.

The Council on Facilities and Equipment's comprehensive text, *Facility Design and Management for Health, Fitness, Physical Activity, Recreation, and Sports Facility Development*, first published in 1946, has become an essential tool for thousands of students and professionals. The 9th, 10th,

11th, and upcoming 12th editions were edited by Thomas H. Sawyer, AAPAR's representative on AAHPERD's Board of Governors since 2006. The Safety and Risk Management Council has been an important player in disseminating critical legal concepts for sport and recreational professionals, having published three books, one newsletter, and one CD on sport law and safety. LaRue states that "the work of the councils provides professionals and the public with excellent programs, products, and services."

Reaching Beyond the Alliance

Throughout the decades, countless association members have helped develop industry standards, affect national policy, and extend physical education to other nations. George Oberle, president of ARAPCS from 1985 to 1986 and an AAHPERD member for more than 50 years, notes that he and his AAHPERD colleagues were "on the cutting edge of our profession...positioned to develop new experiences for our students." Among those experiences was the creation of undergraduate and graduate programs in health, physical education, and recreation.

Oberle consulted with the Special Olympics and helped to develop their Unified Sports program. President Reagan appointed him to the National Council on Disability, where he helped write the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). He and other council members held open forums across the country to listen to people with disabilities in order to understand their issues. Oberle says they had to decide whether to write the ADA in specific or general terms. "We decided to be general because we knew the world was going to change," he says. He believes the ADA has held up well in court challenges because of that built-in flexibility.

A member of the Alliance since 1949, Ray Cizek joined AAHPERD's staff in 1962. As director of AAHPERD's Peace Corps Project, he was responsible for administering the program and recruiting college students to volunteer for the Peace Corps to teach physical education and selected sports in schools. Projects took place in Senegal, Morocco, the Ivory Coast, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, but the program was discontinued in 1968 when the Peace Corps stopped contracting with organizations such as AAHPERD. In the mid-1960s, AAHPERD joined the President's Council on Youth Fitness to develop and nationally promote its Youth Fitness Test and administer the influential fitness award program.

Divining the Future

Looking ahead, how will AAPAR influence America's health and physical fitness? "I am not sure our most important projects have occurred yet," Hypes says. "Given the national health crisis, AAPAR can and should take a lead, providing strategic direction to ensure Americans' prosperity and longevity."

Cizek believes that the newly created Head Start, Body Start National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play has enormous potential to make a contribution in the lives of young children. The center was created through a collaboration between AAPAR and the National Association

Table 1. Councils Then and Now

In 1949 the General Division was created as the fourth division of AAHPER, joining the Health Education, Physical Education, and Recreation divisions. The General Division offered a home for special-interest groups that didn't fit neatly into the other divisions. The General Division included 12 sections, three of which originated in AAHPER well before 1930.

1. Aquatics (now the Council for Aquatics Professionals)*
2. Administration and Supervision (now the Administration & Leadership Development Council)*
3. Athletics—Boys and Men
4. Athletics—Girls and Women
5. Camping and Outdoor Education (now the Council for Adventure and Outdoor Education/Recreation)*
6. Dance (now the National Dance Association)
7. Measurement and Evaluation (now the Measurement & Evaluation Council)*
8. Professional Education
9. Professional and Public Relations
10. Research (now the Research Consortium)
11. Students
12. Therapeutics (now the Adapted Physical Activity Council)*

**Still exist today as councils within AAPAR*

Other current AAPAR councils include:

- Children, Youth & Families Council
- Council on Aging & Adult Development
- Council for Lifelong Recreational Sports
- Council on Facilities and Equipment
- Fitness & Wellness Council
- Professional Recreation Council
- Safety & Risk Management Council

for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) and is funded by a \$12 million grant—AAHPERD's largest ever—from the federal Administration for Children and Families.

LaRue encourages AAPAR members to serve on councils, and he wants to step up efforts to recruit new members, especially young professionals and future leaders who can continue the pioneering work that so many past and current leaders have undertaken. "It's important for us to recognize that we're all about wellness," Oberle says. If AAPAR continues to embrace the wellness concept, I see it playing a major role in coordinating body, mind, and spirit."

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