

**Darien, Illinois  
Oral History Project**

**Ms. Pat Kampwirth**

**interviewed by Deb Barrett  
October 9, 2013**

**Indian Prairie Public Library  
Darien, Illinois**

**Today is Wednesday, October 9, 2013 and I am with Ms. Pat Kampwirth at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Ms. Kampwirth was born on September 17, 1939 in Chicago, Illinois. She has lived in Darien since about 1967 and is here to share her memories about this area.**

### **Coming to the Area**

**So Pat, when did your family first move to this area? Where were you moving from and what brought you here?**

We had been living in Austin, Texas where my husband went back to school to get his bachelor's degree in physics. He interviewed for a job at Argonne.

Originally we moved from Austin to an apartment in Hinsdale, Illinois. We were looking for a home closer to Argonne and we came upon one that we rented for a while and subsequently bought.

**Was it just you and your husband or did you have kids at the time?**

At the time we had two children: Catherine, who was five when we moved here, and Gregory, who was four.

**So you were looking for a home to raise the kids in rather than apartment, and someplace close. So you didn't move that far. So you had moved to Texas for your husband's school, then came back here. You were sort of back in the Chicago area again.**

Right. We wanted to be close to relatives for our children's sake so they could grow up with family.

**And Argonne is just outside of Darien.**

Right, about ten minutes away.

**So you moved to what part of Darien?**

Well, we moved to what was called Brookhaven West at that time. There are two Brookhaven's, and we were in the area west of Cass Avenue.

**So this was your first home?**

Yes.

**And you said you rented for a while and then bought it later on. What do you remember of what was not yet called Darien? What do you remember about this area at the time?**

Well, there were several subdivisions and many, many farms west of what is now Darien. Mainly down 75<sup>th</sup> Street that was all you saw, were farms. Now it's wall-to-wall houses.

**A lot of open space ...**

Is gone.

**Were your relatives in the city?**

Yes. My mother was around Harlem and Irving in Chicago, and his parents were northwest around Laramie.

**So when you were in Hinsdale, Hinsdale had been an established city already. What did your relatives think about your move to this farm-type area?**

They were just grateful that we were in the area rather than in Texas!

**When you moved here, what did you do? Your daughter was starting school?**

Yes.

**Where did she go to school?**

She went to kindergarten in the basement of St. John's Lutheran Church at the time.

**And the church was not the building we see now.**

Yes, it was.

**On Cass Avenue? I thought they had moved it.**

That's what I remember.

**And your son was not yet in school.**

No, he was not.

**The church was on Cass Avenue. What was Cass Avenue, 75<sup>th</sup>, Plainfield – what was in that area at the time? That's a busy intersection now!**

There was an old church on the northeastern corner, which they tore down a few years later after we moved here. It was an historical church whose name I don't remember. Maybe it was St. John's original church. Then, west of that, was the old Lace

School. And I think there was the first level of the new Lace School which they built onto later – kind of like a strip mall.

**What did you do for grocery shopping? What shopping was available?**

There was one store where the Walgreen's is now. Was it called Brookhaven?

**IGA?**

IGA, yes. That was it. There was a Jewel further toward Hinsdale on 55<sup>th</sup> Street – a small Jewel there. But this was a lot closer. That was all there was around there.

**That was for food shopping, and that was pretty close for you. What about shopping for clothes and things like that? Where did you go?**

That's a good question! I think Oak Brook was there.

**They were just opening.**

Yorktown wasn't built yet, I don't believe. So I think that was about it.

**There wasn't a lot around.**

There was not much at all.

**What did you and your family do for recreation?**

Lived! We did a lot of things with the family. We did go camping occasionally – we were tent campers.

**What about movies and things?**

We went to the movies occasionally, but I think at the time the Tivoli was the only act in town in Downers Grove. There wasn't much else.

**There wasn't much of anything!**

We could always go into Chicago to the museums and things.

**But locally there wasn't much.**

There wasn't much, no.

**Were you working when your kids were little?**

No I was at home. Our younger son was born in 1969 and he was about ten when I went to work. So that would be about 1979. That's why I had the leisure to do this.

**So you saw a need for something for the kids. Tell us how you got interested in that.**

Well, I was nominated for the recreation committee.

**How were you nominated? How did that happen?**

Through the city council. I'm sure my husband had something to do with it! But there were maybe eight of us, and we did this for about three years. We had different lessons for the kids and competitions.

**What year was this about?**

That's a good question. Gregory was ten when I went back to work and I was already on the park board then, so it would have to be before that.

**So maybe around 1970 or before that?**

It was later than that. He was born in 1969. It was the early 1970's somewhere.

**So it was after Darien was incorporated.**

Yes.

**Darien was incorporated and we had the city government in place, but there wasn't a lot for the kids yet. And you said you had worked with Westmont.**

Yes. Joe Schultz was the director there, and he helped us. We held joint programs. Then, after that ...

**Tell us what the joint programs included.**

Well, they included maybe about ten things: karate, photography, archery, perhaps tennis. I went to Wannamaker's, and Wannamaker's had craft courses for us, like how to make wreaths and tole painting and things like that. We had maybe five classes through them. The tennis and health center on 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, we approached them and had tennis lessons indoors with them.

So we had things going. We didn't have a director at that time, so I was doing a lot of it because I didn't have a job and had the time. But then, for the summer, we did hire someone – I think her name was Pat Stefanski from Hinsdale. She put together a bunch of craft classes for the summer for us. And I did end up calling for volunteers to teach classes and wound up having help for that also.

We had a full complement of classes and teachers.

**And everything was done by volunteers.**

Yes, except for Pat who was hired. After that we hired a director.

**You were the chairperson of the committee at the time.**

When you're saying 'committee' you're talking about the recreation committee.

**Yes.**

Actually, not. We're kind of going back and forth between the recreation committee and the beginning of the park district.

I was the second in command. And Mark deLay was so helpful to us because we used the classrooms for classes and things. We couldn't have done it without him at all, and his secretary. They printed things up for us that we were able to put around the city.

**So the Darien School District 61 was ...**

Very helpful.

**You said you had talked to Westmont. Did you approach them?**

Yes. Even before that, when we were on the recreation committee, Sandy Estes who was on the board the same time as I was, we went to Hinsdale. They had a summer program for kids and they were very helpful telling us what programs they had and which were successful and which were not successful. We got a lot of help from a lot of different areas, and that helped on the recreation committee.

**So you gathered a lot of information from the surrounding area, and a lot of help. Did you come up with a plan of what you wanted to see long-term, or was it just trying to keep things going in the short-term initially?**

We were filling in the gaps, let's put it that way, with what children seemed to be interested in and what they seemed to want. We tried to fill that need.

**So you'd add classes or drop classes and activities?**

You could tell. We had enrollment so we could tell where the interest was.

**What were the popular activities? Do you remember?**

No.

**Do you remember any that didn't fly?**

No.

### **Do you know about how many kids were participating?**

No, but we had classes daily and they were pretty much filled. We were in the gym at Lace School. We had very long tables and I'd say we had maybe six of them filled. The interest was there, definitely.

But one of the main reasons I saw for creating a park district was to acquire parks before all the land was gone. All we saw was subdivisions springing up everywhere. The council did make sure that the big developers like Gallagher and Henry set aside some land. It was usually kind of water-detention area.

One of the first things as a park district that we did – Charlie Schultz who had land where the community park is. There was a developer who had an interest and a contract with him, but he had to do it in a certain amount of time. But we had our eye on that land because it was one of the few remaining dry pieces of land that was fairly substantial.

### **That's the Community Park now on Clarendon Hills Road and Plainfield.**

Yes.

So one of the first things we did as a park district ... Well, in order to become a park district we needed a lawyer. We had two lawyers who were working on contingency. We didn't pay them unless we passed a referendum and then we would hire them for a time as our lawyers.

### **Were they people from Darien?**

They were from downtown.

We were told different things by different people. One of most helpful people was the county clerk at the time for DuPage County, who was also the mayor of Woodridge. I can't remember his name, but he was very helpful in getting us on the track of how to do our ballots, how to find a lawyer and things like that.

### **Woodridge was relatively new, too.**

He's been deceased for a while now, but he was very helpful.

So we got these two lawyers to work on contingency. And Don Trigger, he may still be the lawyer for the park district. I haven't been around for a while, but until I left, for 29 years, he was still our lawyer. And his partner, who has not been his partner for a while now. It was a good thing for both of us. He got us started and he got a job!

### **How was the park district formed? Was there a referendum?**

There was a referendum. Right. We approached all the subdivisions. Each subdivision had its own leaders, including Farmingdale – the original Farmingdale opted to be in it, but the one further west did not.

**So, Hinsbrook had its own homeowners' association and those were the people you went to?**

Correct; for each subdivision.

And we'd have coffees with slides. My husband had a fellow physicist who was a good photographer with professional equipment. He would go around with me taking pictures of the events and things like that. That was very helpful.

Also, as a committee, for instance we staged the first Easter egg hunt. We saw different little communities having them and we thought we'd have one.

**Where was the first Easter egg hunt?**

I believe it was behind Lace School.

**The Safety Village wasn't there.**

Not only the Safety Village, but I don't think the ball field was there or it wasn't as well developed. So we had the first one there, I believe, and not at Community Park. Community Park wasn't in play yet.

And we had drawing contests – this was before the park district – for children to draw what they'd like to see in a park. They were put in different stores. And we had different events to make people aware that we needed parks and a park district.

**Do you remember when the referendum was held?**

No; maybe the mid to late 1970's. I gave Steve Patterson all the historical information, and they should have it somewhere in the park district.

**Did the referendum pass the first time?**

Yes, it did. There were three people from the recreation committee that ran, and we had two others. We had five people on the board. The park boards consisted of either 5 or 7 members. So we had a 5 member board.

**Do you remember how many parks were in Darien at the time, in the district?**

They weren't really parks, just land. There were two at the time.

**I know in the Hinsbrook subdivision there was one.**

No. I don't think it was ours yet. The main one was in Farmingdale where's that water, kind of retention pond there.

**The one in Hinsbrook, I know there was a pool there.**

That wasn't ours.



**That wasn't part of the park district.**

No, that was part of the homeowners. They had to buy a membership.

**Right. So that wasn't automatically part of the park district. Is it today?**

No.

**It's still separate.**

As far as I know. That's the way they wanted it.

At one time we considered buying the one that no longer exists, on Plainfield Road.

**East or west of Cass?**

West of Cass. Now it's all condo's. But they used to have a big outdoor and indoor swimming pool. And you could buy memberships. We were members there for a time. But they let it really deteriorate, and we thought it would be too expensive. Standards for private pools and public pools and quite different. They're much higher for a public pool, and we'd have to re-do the whole thing. So we decided not to pursue it, not that we would necessarily have gotten it, but it wasn't to our best interests at the time.

That was it for the pool. And there really wasn't that much of a demand for it because there was one in Clarendon Hills that was open to the public. There was one at Fairview in Downers Grove. So people who wanted to go to a pool could probably buy their own membership. It was kind of a dream at one time, because at one time you could buy acres of land. But by the time we became a park district it was square feet.

**So you were really scrambling to get anything that would work.**

Scrambling, exactly, because prices had gone sky high because of the lack of open space.

**So when you bought the land, did you have specific plans for specific pieces or did you just want to keep open land?**

Well, for the area that did become the Community Park we thought that would become the focal point because that was the largest piece available in Darien.

And we hired ARC Associates' Allen Casky, who was a planner, to come up with a plan. We knew we wanted tennis courts and a ball field, some play equipment and things like that. So he came up with a plan that we followed pretty much. We tried to get grants from the State for certain areas, which we did acquire. I can't remember how much, but we did. We were able to do some of the play equipment areas with the grants we did acquire.

**So the grants were used to help with equipment to develop it.**

Right.

**Are you still on the board?**

No. I was on the board for 29 years. Previous to that we bought a home in South Carolina and I was doing a number of board meetings via phone. But it was not satisfactory because I could only hear part of the meeting – they'd have to move the microphone back and forth. And the people on the board who weren't terribly happy that I was absent so much. And there were people who wanted to be on the board. So I didn't run again.

**What made you so committed to the park district?**

Well, I have children and other children had needs. I grew up in Chicago near a wonderful park – Holstein Park. At that time they had a swimming pool, a large building where they had different kinds of recreation – crafts and gyms. There was a library attached to it. There was a huge covered sandbox which was probably as big as this room. They had swings and ball fields. I just thought it was something that was needed because I had enjoyed it so much.

**What are your thoughts on the changes you've seen over the years in the parks? Has it become something you thought it should be? Was it harder than you thought it would be? Easier than you thought it would be?**

Well, I would have liked to see more parks. We still, I think, are under the standard for population.

**Do you know what the standard is?**

I can't remember off-hand now. I had approached the city council with the guidelines for that. Naperville had passed a donation ordinance where developers had to donate money or land to the park districts. And they did pass that. So we got money from that for development. But almost all the land was gone. We did actually acquire a grant for the area on Cass Avenue that's now Smart Acres, or was Smart Acres. And when people saw that they started selling off their homes. They were not happy. So we did not actually pursue that.

**That was south on Cass Avenue?**

That was south on Cass Avenue. We would have liked that to be a big park there, also. But it just did not work out.

**Did you hear any reasons why people were selling?**

They didn't think they would get the money they wanted from the Park District. Although, according to law you had to get three appraisals and take the one that would be most beneficial to the homeowners. But they didn't see it that way.

**So you had a lot of resistance to developing that piece.**

Oh, yes. Absolutely so. That never happened.

And the area on Cass Avenue near the school where there's a little creek, we wanted to get that also. There was a house on the top of it that I thought would be nice to have kind of an art center, perhaps with a wheel for pottery – something like they have in Hinsdale at the Kathryn Legge Lodge there. But that didn't work out either.

So we didn't get a lot of things we wanted. Because we started so late and with so little money it was difficult to really take advantage of what was available at the time. People wanted things developed; they were paying their taxes and had kids growing up for whom vacant land would not be useful. So we had to do both at the same time.

**What are you most proud of in terms of the park district and what it's accomplished?**

I guess our attainment of the land for Community Park, and our involvement in SEASPAR. I think we're still involved in SEASPAR.

**SEASPAR is the Southeast Association for Parks and Recreation.**

Right, for people with some kind of handicap.

**What is the park district's involvement?**

They have classes for children with handicaps. I was on the first board for that, too, and involved in the organization for that. There were five of us at the beginning. There were other established ones, like for the north shore and places like that. So Woodridge, Downers Grove, Lisle, Darien and Westmont. We were the five original ones. A few years later others joined. I'm not sure they're still involved in it, but when I left they were.

I know we had a neighbor who had two mentally handicapped children and she was overjoyed that there was something for them.

**When did you leave the park board?**

That's a good question! Five or six years ago – I'm not even sure.

**And you did it because you'd been commuting out to the Carolina's.**

And there were so many people who wanted to be on the board that it was unfair to be basically half-time.

**We appreciate the contribution you've made to the community. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about before we finish?**

No. I just wish we had more land. At one time we were pursuing land on Lemont Road that was south of 75<sup>th</sup> Street and now it's all subdivisions.

**More houses got developed.**

It would have been nice to have something further west for the people who live closer to that area.

**Again, we really appreciate and as a resident of Darien I really appreciate your work with the parks. We appreciate your helping to make Darien a nice place to live!**

Thank you.