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SPORT-MINDED TOWN

(Lex Schrag, in the Montreal Standard)

People, should stop thinking of community recreation programs merely as a means of reducing juvenile delinquency, and study the value of planned recreation to the whole community, asserts Gordon Alcott. At 36, Alcott has had nearly a score of years at helping people amuse and instruct themselves. He is a recreation director for Weston, a town of 7,000 on the north-western edge of Toronto.

Juvenile delinquency dropped with a bump a short time after he took office. Mayor Tom Dougherty has proclaimed that he would rather have Alcott around the town than another policeman on the force. But Alcott, himself, would prefer assessment of his efforts as they affect the entire town, rather than as they relate to the comparatively small number of boys his ideas have kept out of trouble.

The schemes he has adapted to Weston's use are aimed at every citizen. He has fangled parkettes with swings, slides and sandpiles for the toddlers. He has persuaded responsible parties to manage the parkettes, gratis, and organized athletic programs for all ages.

Alcott began his career as an expert in recreation at Georgetown, Ont. Through the winter of '36-'37 he noted the lack of organized winter activity for Georgetown's younger fry. He set up a midget National Hockey League, and hit the jackpot.

The idea was new to Georgetown, and it caught on. Alcott tied the youngsters up with contracts that made them forewear cigarettes, late hours and bad marks in school if they wanted to play hockey. Six sponsors kicked in \$20 apiece. The league grossed \$1100 receipts. In a town of less than 3,000 population, that was better than good.

Alcott literally dragged Georgetown fans into the town's arena. He rode the trains and busses back and forth to Toronto lining up stars from the Toronto Maple Leafs for goodwill appearances in the Georgetown rink. He stormed the city papers with stories about his youngsters. He had a good news sense. He got plenty of publicity. The kids drew encouraging crowds with their games.

Furthermore, the league turned out some nice stuff. Bob Goldham, lately of the Leafs, and last season with the Chicago Black Hawks, helped the Georgetown kids win the Ontario Midget NHL championship in 1937. Bob didn't figure in the town playoffs, though. He was too big to fit any of the teams. Joe Schertzl, another leaguer went to one of the Boston Bruins' farm teams when he grew up.

The idea was successful in more than hockey production. Juvenile delinquency hadn't been a major problem in Georgetown. Most of the benefit of the town's midget NHL could be counted in improved school grades, in better mannered

youngsters on the town streets, and in the awakening of community interest.

Last winter, Georgetown won the Ontario Intermediate "A" championship in an arena equipped for the first time with artificial ice. It would be only fair to assume some of the impetus toward bigger and better things for the town started with Alcott's kid hockey league.

Alcott himself, went to the Halleybury, Ont., mining school during the summer of '37. That fall, he went to International Nickel at Copper Cliff as an engineer. Most of his engineering, though, was devoted to the organization of a hockey set-up similar to the one at Georgetown. When summer came, he got the boys pitching ball. He worked out adult sports programs as well. International Nickel was volubly pleased about the whole thing.

Two years ago — June, 1946 — Alcott moved to Weston. The town wasn't wallowing in juvenile delinquency, but the town fathers believed in prevention being better than cure. And the newly formed Community Council needed somebody who knew the ropes.

Last spring a campaign for \$125,000 was started. The money is to build a big community recreation centre, complete with artificial ice plant and full-sized ice surface.

Through the current summer, the program includes a lacrosse series with six teams of boys aged eight to 13; seven softball teams, same age group; six Bobby Sox teams playing six-man soccer in the town's lacrosse bowl; parkettes; three baseball teams for older boys.

The feminine members of the community are by no means the "forgotten men". Forty young ladies are taking tennis instruction from Phyllis Carscadden, engaged for the summer to direct feminine sports. A schedule of six girls' softball teams has already been completed. In July, two stay-at-home camps gave instruction in swimming, archery, crafts and field-work.

For adults Alcott lined up a couple of softball leagues. He's working out a schedule, too, of evening volleyball and horseshoe pitching in the parkettes.

His job, mainly, is to get other people to direct (not "boss") these sports. Coaching or managing a lacrosse team or baseball nine, he reasons, come under the heading of recreational activities. For each of the kid outfits, there is at least one adult taking part in the sports.

An dit is Alcott's plan that the function of management be as griefless as possible. One of the clauses of the contract he hands out states the players must abide in sportsmanship, by the decision of the referee or umpire. The shrill clamour of unsupervised sandlot games is pleasingly absent when Weston youngsters take the field.

Beside being master-mind of the Weston activities, Alcott is president of the Ont. Midget National Hockey League. He is president of the Ontario Central Zone recreation directors.

This sort of program, Alcott claims, wouldn't be going over if it were directed solely at keeping a few dozen youngsters out of trouble. If his schemes weren't providing something interesting for a majority of Weston people, if they didn't work toward community cohesion and improvement, Weston would be getting a new recreation director. Instead, the Community Council, headed by President, Bill Burlinson, threw a party in June to celebrate the second anniversary of organized recreation in Weston.

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