

Frank Vaydik-2009

“This man’s contributions are hard to overstate,” asserted Anita Gorman, former Kansas City Parks Commissioner, describing Frank Vaydik. Originally hired as a consultant by Kansas City in 1962 to help stave off the Dutch elm disease, then ravaging the city parks and boulevards, and was soon recruited as Director of Kansas City Parks and Recreation in 1963. Incredibly, by June 1966, nearly 14,000 new trees were planted. He used the city earnings tax to restore more trees and parks, expanding the system from 5700 acres to 9500 acres under his guidance. Over a 16-year span, 75,000 trees and over 200 public flower beds were established. One of Frank’s proudest achievements was the merger of the Kansas City Recreation Division with the Parks Department in 1966. After assuming the Recreation Division oversight, he saw to it that two additional 18 hole golf courses were constructed, along with 26 new tennis courts, two major tennis centers, four handball/racquetball courts, a variety of sports playing fields including 55 baseball/softball, 20 football, and 12 soccer. He worked to place the Liberty Memorial and Union Cemetery under the auspices of the parks department, and developed Santa’s Wonderland in Gillham Park. With the addition of Riverfront Park, he was instrumental in gaining access to the Missouri River. Perhaps Vaydik’s greatest legacy was his ability to see the importance of parks to people, as demonstrated by the signs he had posted throughout the parks system encouraging people to walk on the grass. Frank Vaydik received many honors and awards: National Distinguished Service Award from the National Recreation and Park Association 1979, American Institute of Architects at Kansas City for “dynamic efforts in the improvement of park facilities and community beauty” in 1965, Distinguished Fellow Award from the American Park and Recreation Society 1973, Fellow Award from the Missouri Park and Recreation Association 1977, and the Missouri Park and Recreation Association Retirement Service Award 1980. He also served as president of the American Institute of Park Executives and chairman of the board of governors of the National Recreation and Park Association. Mr. Vaydik passed away in 1996.