

Calumet Memorial Park District History

By Gene Popa

The Calumet Memorial Park District (CMPD) was founded in 1922 after residents of the City of West Hammond (as Calumet City was then known) and the Village of Burnham voted to establish a park district as a vibrant and ongoing memorial to its residents who had recently served in the First World War. West Hammond had sent more of its young men to the war, per capita, than almost any other community in the United States. So, the feeling among residents was that a more traditional monument, such as a statue or fountain, did not fully represent the pride that local citizens felt for their veterans.

The park district officially launched with a ceremony, parade, and dance on November 11, 1922 (Veterans Day), with two parks: Memorial Park in West Hammond and Burnham Park in Burnham, which opened the previous summer, and several athletic and recreational programs, ranging from baseball to a sewing class, had already debuted. The very first Superintendent (a.k.a. Executive Director) of CMPD...and indeed, in the park district's earliest months, its only paid employee...was Edward Fedosky.

When the park district was officially incorporated, the state assigned not only the two towns which founded it and also a large area of unincorporated farmland to the West. In time, Calumet City and Burnham grew to inhabit much of that territory, and the westernmost portions of CMPD are now within the legal boundaries of South Holland and Dolton.

The fieldhouse at Memorial Park was also the early home to such groups as the American Legion and St. Victor Church until they could build their own facilities.

During the Great Depression, the federal government assigned the administration of the local "New Deal" agencies, the Works Project Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the National Youth Administration to CMPD. Cook County also asked the park district to assume responsibility for operating Burnham Woods Golf Course until the Forest Preserve was assigned control after World War II.

CMPD continued to grow with the four separate and distinct communities it serves in the decades that followed, ultimately expanding in 2022 to more than two dozen park sites. They encompass gymnasiums, the Sandridge Fitness Center (soon to be fully refurbished and relaunched), Burnham Trail Bike Path, and the Family Fun Center at Memorial Park.