

# Matt Bolles' reflections on public life

By Sam Bari

Friday, Nov. 10, was the last day on the job for retiring Parks and Recreation Director Matt Bolles, who has spent 17 years serving the town in that role.

Bolles took a few minutes last week to reflect on the past, comment on the present, and tell about his hopes for the future.

Bolles said that the fondest memories of his parks and recreation experience consist almost entirely of moments spent working directly with children and young teens in a learning environment, and then watching them succeed in high school and beyond. Whether the skills taught were athletic or artistic in nature, or a combination of the two, he said, "It has been a joy to see children, and even adults, gain the poise and confidence to succeed through involvement in recreation."

When asked about his accomplishments during his tenure as recreation director, he spoke in terms of programming, and referred to a list of activities that did not exist as town sponsored programs when he was first hired. The list includes: adult classes in yoga, pilates, tai chi, dance, children's classes in ballet and modern dance, girl's softball, community theatre, summer concerts, teen programs, and more. Even the Youth Litter Corps, formerly state sponsored, is now managed by the town Parks and Recreation Department. While many dedicated volunteers and expert teach-

ers have helped establish many of these programs, Bolles said that he is proud of his role in facilitating the development of much more comprehensive public recreation services than Jamestown had previously known.

"In my early years with the



Matt Bolles

town, I was active on the boards of all of the sports leagues on the island," he said. "As a chapter director and certified clinician with the National Youth Sports Coaches Association, I conducted volunteer coaches' clinics and personally certified over 100 volunteer coaches, helping to establish the proper philosophy for coaching children in our town. At the time, all of the leagues were operating as town programs and funneling their monies through a self-funded town account, just as the softball, basketball, exercise and dance, and the community theatre program still do. I believe the efforts of

my predecessor and I helped put the baseball and soccer leagues on a firm footing, enabling them to eventually become independent of the town, consistent with such leagues in other communities."

People often forget that the department is *parks* and recreation, Bolles said. On the parks side, he is proud of turning the Fort Getty Park operation into a fiscal asset for the town. Before his tenure, the park generated revenues equal to roughly 80 percent of the overall parks and recreation annual budget, and often opened for the season with several vacant sites, Bolles said.

By improving the park and instituting better fiscal policies, revenues immediately increased to where they have consistently exceeded the annual department budget every year since he was hired, and there is a waiting list for sites, he said. Bolles is also proud of the role he played in helping to formulate the new plan for the park, which will make it much more attractive for residents to use, while maintaining the revenue stream, he said.

Other capital projects have

included the soccer fields at Eldred Avenue, the beautiful landscaping and brick patio at the Community Center, the new windows and a long list of public safety improvements at the facility, and six newly paved tennis courts with new fencing at the schools, Bolles said. He also credited the many people who helped make those improvements possible.

When asked what he would have done differently, he said, "While I cannot claim to have always said the right thing, there is really nothing basic that I would have done differently. I fervently believe that public recreation is supposed to strive to serve everyone. As much as I enjoyed my years as a competitive coach, and the many successes, I was always mindful that I was serving fairly elite athletes. Most people, young and old, do not fit that category. Therefore, alternatives to competitive sport are needed." These alternative programs are generating greater participation and more revenues than team sports in other communities. This does not take place at the expense of team sports, he said, but in addition to

them. "When our elected officials begin to realize this, recreation and leisure services can continue to improve in Jamestown," he added.

Bolles said that his hope for the future of recreation in Jamestown is that the general population will be well-served. That means aspiring athletes, artists, musicians, dancers, actors, writers, and anyone else who can benefit from participating in constructive, affordable public programs, as well as anyone of any age who just wants to have a little fun.

When asked what he is doing with the rest of his life, Bolles said, "I would rather not get into specifics, but simply say that my future priorities will be family, music and the arts, keeping physically active, and doing work which is in harmony with the first three."

Bolles contemplated the question about taking an early retirement before answering. He then quoted excerpts from his resignation letter to Town Administrator Bruce Keiser.

"I guess there's a lot of specu-

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