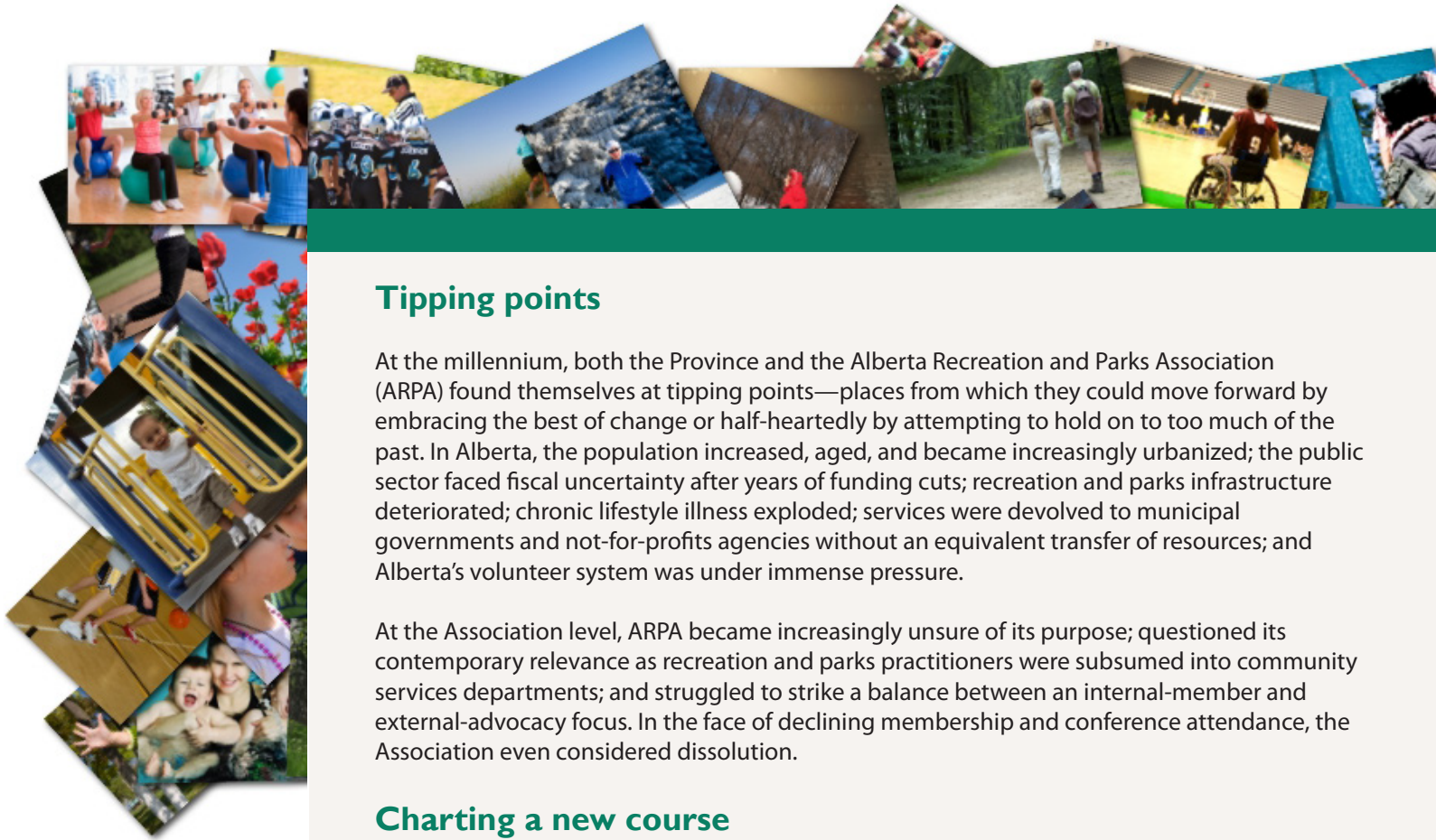




Alberta
Recreation & Parks
Association

A Millennial Renaissance

1999 – 2009



Tipping points

At the millennium, both the Province and the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA) found themselves at tipping points—places from which they could move forward by embracing the best of change or half-heartedly by attempting to hold on to too much of the past. In Alberta, the population increased, aged, and became increasingly urbanized; the public sector faced fiscal uncertainty after years of funding cuts; recreation and parks infrastructure deteriorated; chronic lifestyle illness exploded; services were devolved to municipal governments and not-for-profits agencies without an equivalent transfer of resources; and Alberta's volunteer system was under immense pressure.

At the Association level, ARPA became increasingly unsure of its purpose; questioned its contemporary relevance as recreation and parks practitioners were subsumed into community services departments; and struggled to strike a balance between an internal-member and external-advocacy focus. In the face of declining membership and conference attendance, the Association even considered dissolution.

Charting a new course

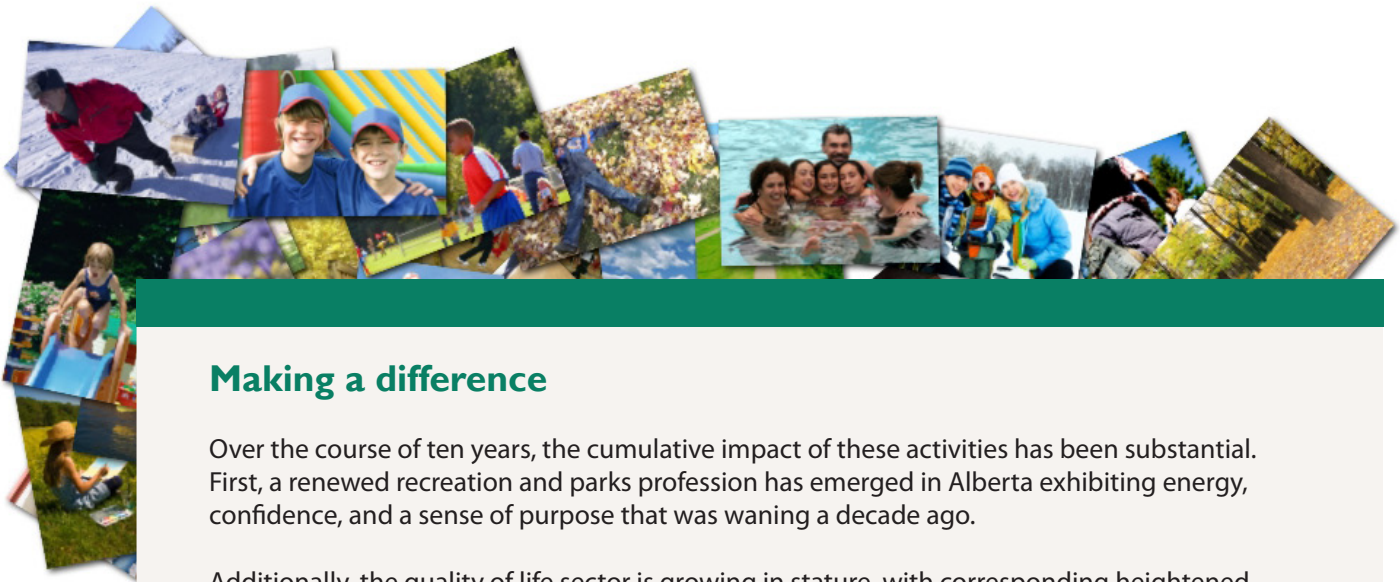
Instead, in 1999 ARPA decided to undergo a major organizational review. The review consisted of a member survey and a series of consultations with external stakeholder organizations, and was centered on membership, organizational governance, strategic planning, funding, and communications. This review set the stage for a new beginning for the Association, leading to the development of a new governance and organizational model built upon:

- re-positioning ARPA as a leader in the recreation and parks field, and the larger quality of life sector
- developing a new approach to fundraising and cooperation with other organizations and the corporate sector
- enabling ARPA to better serve its members' professional development needs

Laying the foundations

Beginning in 2002, as ARPA sought to establish itself as a recreation and parks research, advocacy, and program development leader, it led a collaborative project involving more than 80 quality of life stakeholder organizations and groups across the province. The report that resulted, *Foundations for Action: Enhancing the Quality of Life in Alberta*, contains both a strategic vision for an emerging quality of life sector, as well as an action plan for recreation and parks, which has become the blueprint for much of what ARPA has undertaken in recent years.

Foundational research initiatives undertaken by ARPA throughout the decade included an extensive inquiry into the deteriorating state of Alberta's major community recreation facilities, an historical analysis of public funding of recreation (1988-2007), a recreation industry labour market analysis, and a determination of the economic significance for the growing business of recreation in Alberta. Additionally, ARPA developed a report about recreation's capacity to address chronic illness and personal/community well-being, and completed a province-wide survey (2008) measuring public perceptions of the use and benefits of local government recreation and parks services.



Making a difference

Over the course of ten years, the cumulative impact of these activities has been substantial. First, a renewed recreation and parks profession has emerged in Alberta exhibiting energy, confidence, and a sense of purpose that was waning a decade ago.

Additionally, the quality of life sector is growing in stature, with corresponding heightened support from the corporate sector, and growing public appreciation and support for recreation and parks. Further, relations have improved between ARPA and elected municipal and provincial officials and research such as ARPA's Community Recreation Infrastructure in Alberta report have directly impacted significant provincial initiatives such as the introduction of the Major Community Facilities Program (2007 and 2008).

Finally, enhanced educational benefits for members along with initiatives such as ACE Communities and the Benefits Catalogue have helped reinvigorate the recreation and parks field, and foster a new generation of community leaders respectively.

The road ahead

ARPA has experienced a remarkable transformation during the past decade. Its image, profile, and accomplishments have been impressive in number, remarkable in scope, and effective in impact. However, an inevitable consequence of success is that more is asked for, and the agenda for the next ten years already includes initiatives such as Kids at Hope; getting serious about children's play; reconnecting children and nature; and afterschool recreation.

ARPA will also be focused on the role of recreation, parks, and open space in regional planning; renewed advocacy for investments in urban and countryside parks; grass roots community sport development and physical literacy; building-out the Facility Inventory Tracker System; acquisition and renewal of the Lifestyle Information Network (LIN); and development of a "Centre of Excellence" for Recreation, Community and Quality of Life.

The "Centre of Excellence" initiative is being conceptualized around components such as an advanced education and learning centre; Benefits Portal and information and knowledge management; standards of excellence; trends scanning and policy analysis; translational/practice-based research; and community development services.

As ARPA continues to review its governance structure, set priorities within a new strategic plan, and develop a communications plan for telling members, stakeholders, decision-makers, and ordinary Albertans who we are, what we do, and why it matters, the Association moves forward into the next decade upbeat and well-poised to embrace the marvelous opportunities and tackle any challenges that lie ahead.

This document has been adapted from a presentation originally developed and delivered by Dr. Tim Burton and Barbara Hill at ARPA's 2010 Provincial Forum.