

Introduction and Welcome Address

John Gemello, Vice President of Academic Affairs, San Francisco State University

Welcome on behalf of SFSU to attendees of the Social Aspects and Recreation Research Symposium, our distinguished keynote speakers and guests. Tonight I want to give you a brief background on SFSU and its connections with this conference. SFSU's mission is create and maintain an environment of learning, research and community service. We serve over 24,000 widely diverse students, faculty conduct research on today's most pressing issues and we provide service to our community and individual professions.

This is an important conference because the theme of "Linking People to the Outdoors: Connections for Healthy Lands, People and Communities," addresses critical issues we face in San Francisco and in other cities around the country and internationally. I wanted to share with you for a moment some of the efforts by programs at SFSU and our partners that address imperative issues illustrative of this conference theme.

An important issue today, sadly, is youth violence and crime. *The Pacific Leadership Institute*, a part of SFSU's Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, provides youth development and leadership opportunities for at-risk youth identified by our public schools and police department. Last year over 5,000 middle and high school children participated in PLI programs. Among PLI's programs is a ropes course, managed by SFSU and staffed by trained high school guides located in Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Another concern today is accessibility and employment for disabled populations. *Operation Access* is a program within the RLS Department that facilitates youth and adults to develop skills and accessibility strategies so they can enjoy our outdoor recreation areas. It also trains these youth to be program leaders and many of them are transitioned into jobs within the City of San Francisco Department of Recreation and Parks each summer.

Providing healthy and educational activities for families and youth close to home is as important today as ever. The *American Humanics Program* within the RLS Department works cooperatively with over 60 Bay Area non-profit recreation organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA, to provide our students with leadership, fund raising and management skills necessary for success in the youth and human service field.

Tourism is San Francisco's largest private sector employer. Through a number of means the *RLS and Hospitality Management Departments* at SFSU work with the city's tourism providers, such as the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, Pier 39 and Golden Gate National Recreation Area, through research, evaluations, strategic planning, committee memberships and student interns.

Many experts feel that we must expand the benefits of outdoor recreation beyond traditional users. It is both ethically and politically imperative that we broaden the users of public outdoor recreation areas beyond traditional visitors. SF is an excellent example of how ethnically diverse the rest of the USA will be in the future. But in many instances the users of forests and parks are not representative of residents, be they Chinese Americans or lesbian youth. It is important that we increase the diversity of those who receive the health and spiritual benefits from visiting our national forests, local, state and national parks and historic sites, that are being so well documented by presenters at this conference. An example of efforts by SFSU to bring in non-traditional users, who are often ethnic and frequently inner city urban, is the 6 year old *FAM CAMP* program. Here we work with California State Parks to introduce low income families from ethnic communities to the joys and benefits of spending time together camping outdoors and the need to protect these park resources. To me this nicely illustrates the connections between recreation and healthy lands, people and communities.

In closing, I commend you the participants of the SARR conference, our guest keynote speakers and my SFSU colleagues for the good work you are doing and wish you a successful conference.