

Pugsley Medal Citation

"The Honorable Cornelius Amory Pugsley Medals are the most prestigious awards that recognize outstanding contributions to the promotion and development of public parks in the United States...The inaugural Pugsley Medals were awarded in 1928. The winner of the first National level award was Stephen T. Mather, the first director and "father" of the National Park Service. The distinguished pedigree of subsequent honorees has confirmed the prestige and status of the awards."

National Park Foundation
American Academy of Park and Recreation Administration
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John L. Crompton (1944-) received the Pugsley Medal in 1999 "for his extraordinary contributions in providing philosophic direction, policy guidance and empirical research in the areas of marketing and financing park and recreation services, and his effectiveness in disseminating that knowledge to professionals in the field."

Crompton holds the rank of Distinguished Professor of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University. He was born and raised in Hightown, a village at the northern end of Liverpool, in England. In his earliest years, the sand dunes and shoreline at the back of his house were his playgrounds. Ponds in the dunes created by misplaced bombs in World War II and by local people digging out peat for fuel, provided opportunities to catch frogs and newts and to raise tadpoles and minnows in backyard tanks. The transition to adolescence shifted the focus of play to the well-equipped village sports club where evenings, weekends and school vacations were spent playing cricket, tennis and field hockey. He attended Waterloo Grammar School from 1955 to 1963 where he captained the school's cricket, soccer, cross-country and track and field teams.

The interest in sport led him to Loughborough College where he studied physical education and geography from 1963 to 1966. At that time, Loughborough College had only 900 students, but it was widely acknowledged to be the UK's top higher education institution in the field of physical education. Crompton was valedictorian of his class. After receiving his teaching certificate from Loughborough College, Crompton taught high school for one year in Kirby, close to Liverpool. In 1967 he went to the University of Illinois, where he completed a MS degree in Recreation and Park Administration in 1968. In 1970 he earned another MS degree from Loughborough University in Recreation Management. This was the first year of the first degree course to be offered in Europe in the recreation/leisure field.

In 1970, he joined Loughborough Recreation Planning Consultants as their first full-time employee. When he left as managing director in 1974, LRPC had developed into the largest consulting firm in the United Kingdom specializing in recreation and tourism, with a full-time staff of twenty-five which was supplemented by a number of part-time associate consultants.

In 1974, Crompton went to Texas A&M University. He received a Ph.D in Recreation Resources Development in 1977. For some years he taught graduate and undergraduate courses in both the Department of Recreation and Parks and the Department of Marketing at Texas A&M University, but in the early 1980s he moved to teach exclusively in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences.

Crompton's considerable impact on the field was a function not only of his conceptual and empirical research contributions and of his talent at communicating the usefulness of his work to professionals, but also of his high energy level and passion for the parks and conservation field. In a 1993 article which reviewed Crompton's contributions at that point in his career, the authors commented:

In a recent newsletter to former graduate students, John Crompton wrote "being able to race competitively again and experience the exhilaration of running to exhaustion has substantially upped my morale." John's own words speak eloquently of the uniqueness and enthusiasm with which he approaches the passions of his life.

Crompton pioneered the introduction of marketing concepts and techniques into the public sector of the parks and recreation field in the US. Before his initial work in the 1970s, marketing concepts and techniques had been developed and applied exclusively in the private sector. Since some park and recreation services are similar to services offered in the private sector, this field was an effective conduit and laboratory for facilitating the transition of marketing into the public sector.

At the beginning of Crompton's research program, there was no awareness among public sector park and recreation managers of the contribution that marketing could make to sustaining and enhancing their resources and the experiences of their clientele. A *Parks and Recreation* magazine article reported:

Two years after moving to America, John Crompton presented an educational session at NRPA's annual congress in 1976. Even though he was a leader in marketing parks and recreation in his native United Kingdom, Crompton stood in a large conference room in front of only a handful of people in Boston, Mass. "It was totally embarrassing" he recalled. "Nobody at that time realized marketing, which was business-related, had anything to do with parks and recreation."

The initial focus of Crompton's research program was to demonstrate the effectiveness of a marketing approach compared to the prevailing narrow institutional-focused perspective. As the usefulness of marketing concepts became more widely recognized, his research program's emphasis shifted to the more specific concerns of empirically refining the application and adaptation of marketing concepts to the public sector context. As awareness of marketing's potential increased among professionals in the field, he extended this application beyond the context of recreation services, which in some respects were analogous to services in the private sector, to the much more challenging arena of social welfare services offered by recreation and park agencies which had no private sector parallel.

Crompton's impact on the field in the 1970s and 1980s was characterized by Bill Bird (Pugsley Medal 1988) in the following terms:

John Crompton has personally contributed more for the advancement of our profession than any other individual during my tenure in the field... I first met John in the seventies...when the entire profession wallowed in self-pity due to the effects of Proposition Thirteen. The public demanded more services and less taxes. Most of local government solved at least a part of their problem by cutting Park and Recreation budgets to the bone...The morale of Park Directors attending various conferences seemed at an all-time low, projecting a feeling of doom and rejection. This was about the time John hit the scene.

John first taught us how to turn "Cost Centers" into "Profit Centers" – which helped our budgets more than you can imagine. He stimulated our imagination for devising new ways of generating cash from our facilities without prostituting the meaning of Public Leisure. He preached the importance of our field and emphasized how the cost can easily be repaid with savings on health care, criminal justice and human resources. He put us back on track by giving us pride in ourselves and our profession, and we have been thriving ever since. We all owe John Crompton a bucket-full of thanks.

Some marketing concepts proved to be easily adaptable to the public sector, but others required substantial amendments before they could be used by park and recreation professionals. The concept of pricing was particularly challenging to adapt to public sector contexts, while the notion of equity is a central precept of public service delivery which has no parallel in the private sector to which marketing in the public sector had to adapt. Thus, Crompton's research program on marketing especially focused on these concepts. His work was widely embraced by professionals in the field. For example, an examination of the pricing policies of major city park and recreation agencies showed that most of them originated from Crompton's work, while clauses in agency mission statements, delivery policies and contracts written for work that is privatized often

reflected his equity work. In Texas, his pricing research guided the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department through a five-year staged program of implementing radical changes in the price structure for admission to state parks which it undertook in the mid-1990s.

In the mid-1980s when the marketing discipline recognized that effective marketing had to focus on internal publics as well as external client groups and that service quality was the central determination of customer satisfaction. Crompton was again in the vanguard of introducing these concepts into the public sector. His conceptual and empirical work in service quality was widely embraced and implemented in the field.

In addition to his marketing research program, Crompton was prominent in developing and disseminating alternative financing strategies for funding park and recreation services. When he started working in the field in the early 1970s, agencies were funded almost exclusively by tax funds. After the tax revolt of the late 1970s and early 1980s, tax funds were regarded as seed money that had to be used to leverage additional resources from the private sector. Crompton's writings in such areas as exactions, joint partnerships, privatization, contracting-out, sponsorships and donations were central to broadening practitioners' awareness of the potential of the new tools that were available to them. An editorial in the *Journal of Leisure Research* commented:

Crompton is known worldwide for his work on the marketing and financing of leisure services...His focus on finding answers to the question "How do we pay for leisure services in an era of reduced public tax support?" has been the most significant research contribution of the past decade in aiding public recreation administrators to adjust to difficult financial restraints. His timely research contributions to the profession have not only been high quality but his ability to communicate his findings to practitioners is masterful.

In the 1990s, Crompton initiated a research program aimed at identifying the extent to which park and recreation services conferred "public" benefits on communities. These are benefits that accrue to a preponderance of residents in a community even though they do not use any of the services or facilities offered by park and recreation agencies. This is a central policy issue, since the assumption of such community-wide benefits provides much of the justification for the tax subsidies that fund most agencies.

This led to the development of what he termed "a new paradigm" for public sector marketing. This paradigm recognized the inadequacies associated with trying to use the traditional private sector model that was undergirded by notions of an open system, self-interest, and voluntary exchange, to the public sector where such notions did not prevail. His new paradigm recognized that the prevailing conditions in the public sector were a closed system, public interest

manifested through "coercion mutually agreed upon," and redistribution. The implications of this for marketing practice in the public sector were that instead of focusing on the marketing mix variables of product, price, distribution and promotion, emphasis in the new paradigm was on the concepts of positioning and equity.

Crompton is the most published scholar in the history of both the tourism and the parks and recreation fields. In the tourism field there is a plethora of journals, but two are widely recognized as being Tier One journals. They are *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Journal of Travel Research*. Crompton is the most published researcher in both of them.

His tourism research program investigated how tourists make decisions to select a preferred destination and how they evaluate the experience when it is over. One of his early articles, concerned with tourists' motives, is the most cited article in the tourism literature. His tourism research program has been directed at developing tools to measure and improve social-psychological insights into tourists' motives which impel behavior; the role of cognitive distance in visitors' decisions; the formation of choice sets; positioning, image, and the way in which destination constructs are formulated; search behavior and involvement; and the identification and impact of constraints on tourists' visitation.

In the parks and recreation field, there are three Tier One journals: *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Leisure Sciences*, and *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*. Crompton has published three times as many articles in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* as the next most prolific author in that journal. No ratings are available for the other two journals but it is likely that he is at, or near, the top in those outlets also. A colleague at the University of Waterloo in Canada in a 1999 analysis reported: **"Crompton and his graduate students are personally responsible for between 20 and 25 percent of the academic recreation management literature published in North America during the 1990s (I did not factor in the impact of his students' students, many of whom are now publishing prolifically)."**

There is some overlap between the tourism and the parks and recreation fields, but it is usual for academics to specialize in one or the other. There are no others who have achieved national and international prominence in both fields. Crompton is not merely prominent in both, he is the top ranked national and international scholar in the literatures of both. The quantity and quality of his research output and its impact on the fields is unique.

Crompton has conducted many hundreds of workshops for professionals on Marketing and/or Financing Leisure Services. He has lectured or conducted workshops in many foreign countries and has delivered keynote addresses at the Annual National Park and Recreation Conferences in Great Britain, Canada,

Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Japan. The effectiveness of his interactions with professionals was explained in the following terms:

John is a quality teacher (he has won several teaching awards at Texas A&M) who enjoys interacting with a good audience. His great demand as a speaker is due not only to the content of his work, but also the enthusiasm with which he presents it.

In 2006 the city of College Station named a new 16 acre park, John Crompton Park. The *Texas Recreation and Park Magazine* reported:

Dr. Crompton has made many contributions to state, national and international teaching, research and outreach projects. However, many people around the country don't know that John has also devoted a considerable amount of his time and energy over the years to improving the quality of life in his home community of College Station... Thus, in honor of his many contributions to the field of parks and recreation in his local community, it is fitting that the city of College Station has bestowed this honor on John Crompton.

Sources:

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This profile was partially developed by Peter Witt.