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ADULT FITNESS PARK AT UNIVERSITY--
PATTERNED AFTER SWISS PARKS--OPENS
FOR FREE PUBLIC USE ON MISSOULA CAMPUS

By Dennis Sale
UM Information Services

MISSOULA, Mont.--

An adult fitness park patterned after the popular roadside parks of Switzerland has been officially opened for free public use in the University of Montana Family Housing area.

The fitness park, located adjacent to the base of Mt. Sentinel and southeast of the Sisson Apartment Complex, 2000 Maurice Ave., is included in an area 100 yds. long and a maximum of 40 yds. wide.

Besides a jogging track 1/6 of a mile long, the UM Fitness Park includes nine exercise stations--leap frog, hurdles, stride jumping, chin-ups, stair running, hand-walk, bench sit-ups, straight-arm walking and push-ups.

John Burton, a 1972 UM recreation graduate, developed the fundamental model and basic design for the fitness park, and Gary L. Stowe, a UM senior in recreation, obtained donations of materials from various businesses and other organizations in Missoula and vicinity for construction of the park.

Burton said fitness parks or "Vita Paracours" originated in Switzerland and were installed along the autobahn in areas similar to our Interstate Highway rest areas.

"The fitness parks in Switzerland were installed by an insurance company which felt that passing motorists could stop and revitalize their minds and bodies and, in doing so, reduce the number of accidents on the autobahn," Burton explained.

Burton said the idea locally for a physical fitness park originated in a class taught by Dr. Brian J. Sharkey, a UM professor of health, physical education and recreation.

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"I was a member of the class, and later, while I was attending the National Recreation and Park Convention in Vancouver, B.C., I saw a similar park there," Burton said. After returning to Missoula from Vancouver, Burton and Dr. Sharkey further discussed the feasibility of constructing a fitness park somewhere in Missoula or vicinity.

A site suitable for the park was set aside by Keith Larson, director of UM Family Housing. Several local businesses contributed materials for the physical fitness facility-- Evans Products Co., M & S Ready Mix, Associated Asphalt and Wright Lumber Company. The U.S. Army contributed lumber from its portable sawmill at Fort Missoula for the park.

"Also, the management of UM Family Housing was very helpful in furnishing equipment needed to transport materials and a tractor-backhoe apparatus for digging holes," Burton said.

Describing the overall utility features of the park, Burton said: "The jogway is designed without obstructions so those jogging won't have to vary their gate. The track itself is filled with sawdust shavings to minimize the chances that fitness park users will suffer shin splints. The park is designed so those using it can just jog, or exercise on any one of the nine apparatuses in the park."

Stowe said the elderly and those who are inactive should contact their physicians before they use the park to insure that use of the park facilities will not endanger their health. Also, young children probably would find it difficult to utilize the park facilities, he said.

"Some of the stations in the UM Fitness Park--chinups, sit-ups and overhead ladder-- would be a big challenge for younger kids," Stowe explained. "If we could add a few more stations, such as log climbing, a sandbox and sawdust pits to the present park, we could better serve kids age 12 and under."

Burton said the fitness park course serves a dual function.

"It serves as a facility for those who wish to maintain a high standard of physical fitness and it can be valuable in helping control weight," he said. "The park can also be used as a test of fitness."

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"The shorter the time taken to complete the course, the more physically fit a person is," Burton said. "However, the duration required to complete the course has little effect on the amount of calories expended. Therefore, a person who desires to lose weight can utilize or burn up the same number of calories as those who finish the course in a shorter period of time."

Grass, trees and shrubbery are being added to the facility. Landscaping is scheduled to be completed sometime this spring and park maintenance will be handled by the UM Family Housing maintenance staff.

Stowe said the UM fitness park could readily serve as a model for similar facilities in other cities.

"I feel a park of this nature fills a definite need in Missoula, and I also feel that more parks of this nature would be used extensively by the public in Missoula or in any other city, regardless of size," Stowe emphasized.

Burton, a 1972 recreation graduate of the University of Montana, has been employed by the U.S. Forest Service. He graduated from Beaverhead County High School, Dillon, in 1960 and is son of Beatrice E. Burton, 532 South Idaho Street, Dillon.

Stowe, a senior in recreation, will graduate this spring from UM. He graduated from Foley High School in Foley, Minn., in 1957. He plans to enter the recreation business at a private resort after he receives his bachelor's degree from UM in June. He is son of Mr. and Mrs. Halvor A. Stowe, Rt. 2, Foley, Minn.

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