

DESIGNATION REPORT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA



VETERANS PARK
(aka) CITY PARK
801 NE 1ST St.
Delray Beach, Florida 33483

DESIGNATION REPORT; VETERANS PARK

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Report prepared January 1, 2025 by Price Patton, Allen 'Sandy' Zeller and Roger Cope on behalf of the Delray Beach Preservation Trust. Kayleigh Howald, Archivist for the Delray Beach Historical Society, provided invaluable historic documents, details and images.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Location:	801 NE 1st St., Delray Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida
Purchase date:	March, 1924
Architects	Pope & Blake (circa 1925, 1947); Kenneth Jacobsen, 1966
Builders	Unknown
Present owner	City of Delray Beach
Present Zoning	Open Space
Legal Description	Block 132, Plat of the Fractional Easthalf of Section 16. Township 46 South Range, 43 East, as Recorded in the Plat, Book 1, Page 25 of the Public Records of Palm Beach County, Florida.
Parcel Control No.	12-43-46-16-D3-001-0000
Classification for Designation	Cultural significance Architectural significance Community Planning and Development

Criteria for Designation

Section 4.5.1(B) of the Land Development Regulations of the City of Delray Beach outlines the criteria for designating properties of sites to the Local Register of Historic Places. At least one criteria from paragraphs (2) or (3) must be met to justify designation. Listed below are the criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation:

(2) A building, structure site, interior or district will be deemed to have historical or cultural significance if it meets one or more of the following criteria:

(d) Exemplifies the historical, political, cultural economic or social trends of the community in history;

(e) Is associated in a significant way with a past or continuing institution which has contributed substantially to the life of the city.

GENERAL INFORMATION (continued)

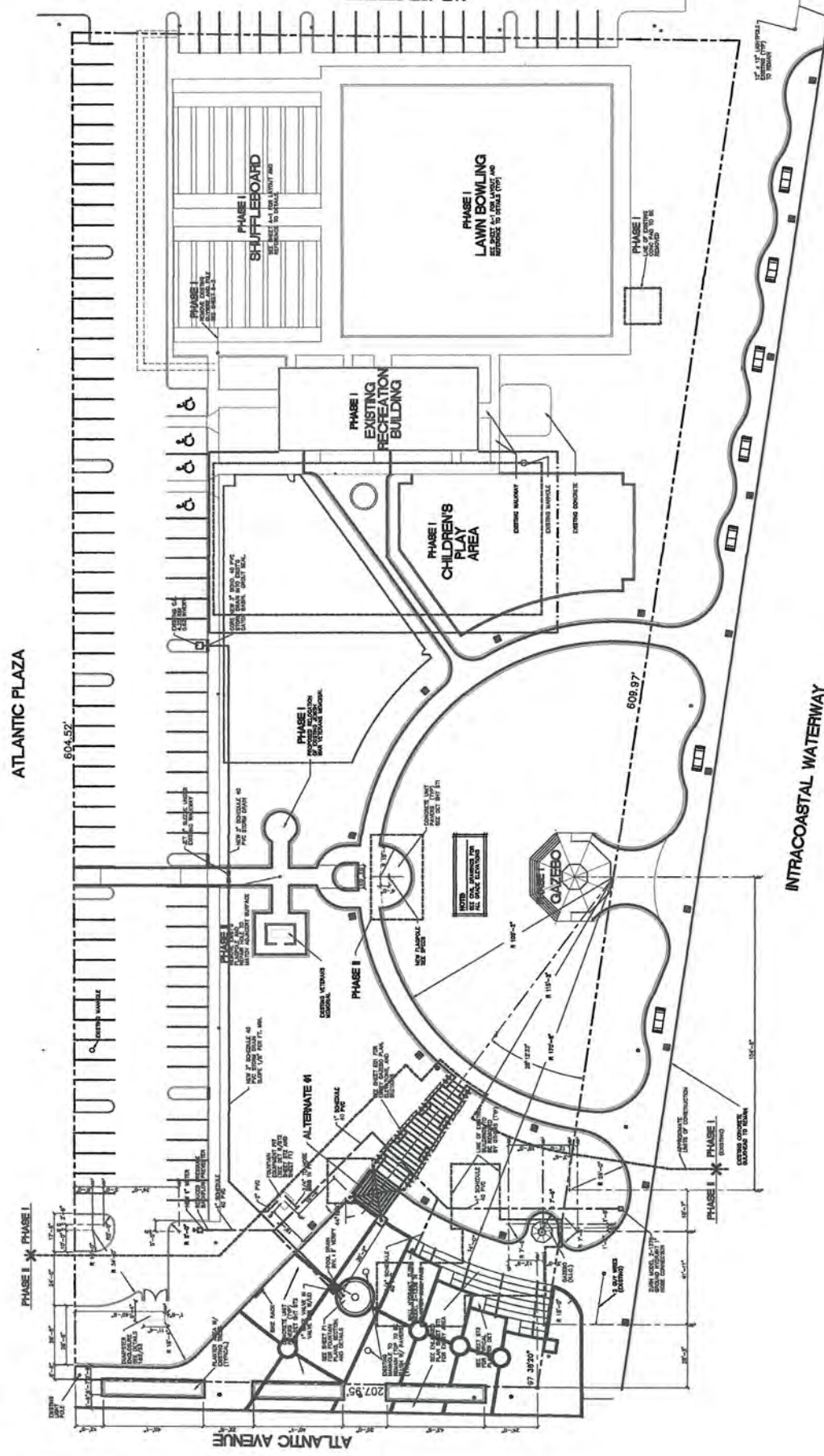
(3) A building, structure or site, or district is deemed to have architectural or aesthetic significance if it fulfills one or more of the following criteria...;

(a) Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one or more distinctive architectural styles.

II. - LOCATION MAP



III. SITE SURVEY



LEGAL DESCRIPTION

BLOCK 132, PART OF THE FRACTIONAL
 SOUTH, RANGE 43 EAST AS RECORDED
 PUBLIC RECORDS OF PALM BEACH
 COUNTY, FLORIDA.

GENERAL NOTES

1. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO UNFINISHED SURFACES UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE.
2. TOP OF FINISH CURBS TO BE FINISH WHERE NOT NOTED OTHERWISE.
3. FINISH WITH/OUT CURBS TO BE FINISH WHERE NOT NOTED OTHERWISE.
4. FOR THE ENTIREMENT SEE SHEET P-4.
5. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO UNFINISHED SURFACES UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE.
6. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE TO UNFINISHED SURFACES UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE.

SITE PLAN



57900881
 DRAWING TITLE
 SITE PLAN

DATE
 8.15.04
 DRAWN BY
 J.B.
 JOB NUMBER
 90073.06
 DRAWING NUMBER

IV. - ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Mid-Century Modern Recreation Center at 801 NE 1st St., was designed by prominent local architect Kenneth Jacobsen and built in 1966. According to the Atlantic Avenue historic survey provided by Richard J Helsenbottle, it is one of only two Mid-Century Modern style buildings in the city's Atlantic Avenue corridor.

The building is distinguished by its soaring gables on the north and south ends. At some point, the gable ends were replaced with clear panels apparently to allow more light into the building.

The Rec Center remains a popular site for community gatherings. Coastal residents have voted there in Local, State and National elections for decades. Many meetings have been held and it is the site for aerobic exercise classes that attracts scores of participants. When the Center was built, Jacobsen relocated the popular shuffleboard and lawn bowling courts to the north side of the building.

The courts attracted scores of shuffleboard and lawn bowling players from the 1960's into the early part of this century, when court maintenance waned. Still, a small group of lawn bowlers continues to play there several days a week.

The courts are the sole remaining ones on Florida's East Coast within hundreds of miles in either direction of Delray.

Sadly, the courts and Rec Center are in dire need of repairs. Hopefully, the designation of the park as historic will encourage the city to seek restoration grants for these facilities and the park itself.

The other significant architectural structure in the park is the Veterans Memorial, bearing the names of Delray Beach residents who made the ultimate sacrifice in World Wars I and II.

The Memorial was paid for by the O'Neal-Priest Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and was dedicated on May 30, 1947, some seven months after the groundbreaking.

It was designed by the well known architectural firm Pope & Blake. It features a gently tapered, 20-foot stucco wall with a marble insert bearing the engraved names of Delray's fallen soldiers.

V. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The period of significance is from 1924 to 1974. The city purchased the park in 1924 for \$10,500 from the Gleasons and two other pioneer Delray Beach families.

The park quickly became an important cultural, social and recreational center for residents, where banquets, public meetings, school events and band performances took place.

The original Mediterranean-style, barrel tile roof bandshell was designed by Pope & Blake (which also designed the War Memorial two decades later). The bandshell was on the west side of the park, facing east.

The Woman's Business Band performed there in the 1920s and it was a frequently used for holiday, school and musical events. It was demolished circa 1964. The Trust proposes erecting an Historic Marker at the site of the bandshell to note its place and tell its story.

In 1932, the park became the site of the annual community Christmas tree and remained so for decades until the tree was moved to the then-recently renovated Old School Square campus in the 1980s.

During World War II, hundreds of soldiers in training lived in Delray Beach and Big Band era bands performed in the bandshell. Famed cartoonist and Delray Beach winter resident Herb Roth memorialized a war-time park concert with a drawing.

Shuffleboard courts were built in 1932 and lawn bowling courts followed in 1962, thanks in part to a \$1,000 donation from winter resident and lawn bowler Walter E. Kistner.

In 1967, Delray Beach architect Kenneth Jacobsen designed the Recreation Center and the lawn bowling and shuffleboard courts were moved to the north side of the Center, where they remain today.

The Rec Center remains a popular site for community gatherings. Coastal residents have voted there in Local, State and National elections for decades. Many meetings have been held there and it is the site for aerobic exercise classes that attracts scores of participants.

The Florida Master Site File report (PB10168) on the park was conducted in February 1999 and notes "This circa 1920 park has been altered, however, its historical associations with Delray Beach are important and the siting on Atlantic Avenue and the Intracoastal Waterway remain intact."

A quarter of a century later, several features of the park, notably the Recreation Center and the shuffleboard and lawn bowling courts, have become eligible for historic designation as they have remained in the same location for more than 50 years.

VI. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Veterans Park has served as a social, recreational and cultural gathering spot for more than a century. A Florida Master Site File report penned 25 years ago said that while there had been changes, the site itself was unchanged and would be eligible for listing on the Local Historic Register. It's significance: Community Planning and Development.

When that report was made, the 1967 Recreation Center and the adjoining shuffleboard and lawn bowling courts had only been there for about 30 years, not eligible for historic consideration.

Today, the Rec Center and the courts are eligible for designation both for their ages and the fact that the Rec Center was designed by one of the most prominent Mid-Century Modern architects in Delray Beach - Kenneth Jacobsen.

The park also features the historic 1947 War Memorial, which bears the names of Delray Beach residents who gave their lives for their country in World Wars I and II.

So not only are the grounds of Veterans Park historic, they are sacred as well.

This 3.5 acre slice of green space in the heart of our Village by the Sea deserves to be preserved forever from development pressures and to allow residents to enjoy its peace and amenities for another hundred years.

VII. VETERANS PARK TIMELINE

*****Period of Significance, 1924-1974*****

March 24, 1924 - The City purchased Block 132 for \$10,500, specifically for a city park. Deed records indicate the property was owned by several pioneer families, including the Gleasons. The park quickly became an important center for Delray residential life, including banquets, public meetings, school events, recreation and band performances.

September 1925 - The original bandshell is constructed by Irwin J. Sinks. It was a duplicate of the shell at Fort Lauderdale. The city manager also purchased an electric motor lawn mower for the "five acres of lawn."

1928 - Shuffleboard courts are installed.

1929 - The City and Recreation Club installed a new "playground system" consisting of a card pavilion with concrete floors and tables, two horseshoe courts, and four more shuffleboard courts.

1929 - An 18-hole miniature golf course, the Teeny Weeny golf course, opened in the park. It was initially built by Lake Worth resident R.S. Erskine and finished by Delray resident and golfer Henry Ostro.

1931 - The American Legion erected the first flagpole during a Flag Day celebration in June 1931. Recreation Club members, residents, and tourists began playing diamond ball (also known as indoor baseball, or softball) in the park.

1932 - The park became the site of the community Christmas tree.

May 30, 1947 - The City dedicated the O'Neal-Priest Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars monument. The groundbreaking occurred in October 1946. The monument was designed by well-known architectural firm Pope & Blake. According to a Delray Beach News report, the city council agreed "to build a sidewalk from Atlantic Avenue to the memorial and to maintain the memorial perpetually."

1962 - The City broke ground on the lawn bowling courts thanks in part to a \$1,000 donation from winter resident and lawn bowling enthusiast Walter E. Kistner. The original four rinks were designed by Arthur Hartley of Clearwater, Florida using a hard surface system he designed.

(Circa) 1964 - The original bandshell is demolished

1967 - Delray Beach architect Kenneth Jacobson designs the recreation center to host card games, art classes, etc., particularly for Delray's growing senior population in the 1960s.

1968 - The park received new landscaping from the combined efforts of Delray's eight garden clubs.

*****END OF PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE *****

1983 - The park was officially renamed Veterans Park in November.

1985 - Delray native Kathi Sumrall works with architecture firm Currie, Stubbins, & Schneider to build a gazebo-style band shell. The gazebo was designed by project architect and associate designer Ed Dugger. Based on newspaper reports, however, the gazebo was not built until the 1990s. The exact date is unclear.

1986 - Jewish War Veterans Post 266 dedicated a monument in November for Veterans Day. JWV Post 266 commander Murray Hymowitz, an MP in Europe during World War II, led the project. It was the only monument of its kind in Florida at the time. In January 1987, an unknown person (or persons) vandalized the monument by knocking it over. Both Hymowitz and city leaders received threatening calls as well.

1991 - The park underwent a grant-funded restoration and redesign via the "Decade of Excellence" grant. This included the installation of 35 Royal Palm trees near the playground area in late 1992 and reconstructing the sea wall.

1993 - 2,300 volunteers (adults and children) built a 11,000 square foot playground structure in five days. The playground, designed by Robert Leathers, cost approximately \$72,000, with a \$10,000 donation from the city. The rest was fundraised.

- A brick walkway was installed throughout the park.
- "A Field of Blue," the statue created by Colorado artist George Lundeen for Veterans Park, was on loan and on display at Old School Square.

1996 - August 1996 is the earliest mention of the city fountain at Veterans Park. The fountain was designed by Miami-based tile artist Carlos Alves.

2000 - Wooden playground was destroyed in a fire and rebuilt by early 2001.

2015 - The City agrees to pay for new playground equipment installed to replace the wooden Leathers playground, costing approximately \$92,000.

2017 - The CRA pays for improvements to the 400-foot sea wall and rebuilding two docks along the Intracoastal. The sea wall was raised approximately 20 inches and leveled.

2022 - The City Commission approved using recreation funds

on beautification and improvements to Veterans Park. According to the Coastal Star, the \$150,000 project included new concrete benches, as well as maintenance for the gazebo and trellises.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

- Delray Beach Historical Society Archives
 - News clippings from the Delray Beach News-Journal, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and the Palm Beach Post
 - Historic images from the Park's "Period of Significance (1924-1974.)"
 - Archived personal correspondences
- State of Florida Master Site File
- City of Delray Beach Deed Records
- City of Delray Beach Building Cards
- The Delray Beach Lawn Bowling Club
- Interviews with life-long Delray Beach resident Roy Simon

IX PRESERVATION TRUST RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF
THE DELRAY BEACH
PRESERVATION TRUST

WHEREAS the Delray Beach Preservation Trust strongly urges that Veterans Park be listed on the Local Register of Historic Places,

WHEREAS this is a long-overdue honor for the Park which, fittingly, turned 100 this year,

WHEREAS the Trust is eager to prepare the designation application and has already engaged with city staff about the process,

WHEREAS since the city owns the Park, staff will not accept an application without permission of the owner — in this case the City Commission,

WHEREAS here are but a few reasons why you should readily agree to proceed with the application,

— The city paid \$10,500 in March 1924 to purchase the Park. The county appraiser now values the nearly 3.5-acre Park along the Intracoastal Waterway at \$35 million. It is truly a treasure and should be preserved for generations to come.

—The Adult Recreation Center at 802 NE 1st St. in the north end of the Park is one of only two Mid Century Modern designs in the entire Atlantic Avenue corridor, as determined by a survey conducted by architect Richard Heisenbottle.

—The Rec Center was designed by architect Kenneth Jacobsen and built in 1966. Jacobsen was a prominent Delray Beach architect (Bob Currie’s father-in-law, in fact). He designed the shuffleboard and lawn bowling courts at the Park as well as residential and commercial buildings throughout the city. Sadly, many have been torn down rather than restored or repurposed.

WHEREAS the Rec Center and the Park need a historically appropriate facelift. Awnings are tattered, courts are deteriorated. One Veterans Memorial is poorly maintained,

WHEREAS designation would encourage the state to award planning grants up to \$50,000 and \$500,000 grants for repair and restoration of the center, the courts and the memorials. Normally, these are matching grants, but since Delray Beach is a Certified Local Government with historic regulations and procedures enshrined in our laws and comprehensive plan, the city would not have to match,

WHEREAS there is clearly at least one historic marker in the Park. The War Memorial was dedicated in 1947 by the O’Neal-Priest Post 4141 Veterans of Foreign Wars “in memory

of our honored dead.” The names of Delray Beach residents killed in World Wars I and II are chiseled in the gray granite face,

WHEREAS historic parks, open spaces and other “landscapes” are equally important in promoting a city’s history as buildings are, according to the National Register of Historic Places,

WHEREAS generations of Delray Beach residents have played in the Park, attended concerts in the Park and enjoyed its shade and solitude,

WHEREAS the Park has hosted community gatherings for 100 years; one of only a handful of historic sites in the city to reach the century mark,

AND WHEREAS The Delray Beach Preservation Trust Board of Directors, a 501(c)(3) not-for profit organization, unanimously approved the resolution on Friday, Nov. 1, 2024,

NOW THEREFORE, the Delray Beach Preservation Trust asks that the Delray Beach City Commission to direct staff to accept the application and expedite the processing of said application so it may be considered on its merits first by the Historic Preservation Board and then by the City Commission. We trust that both boards will vote favorably on the application and agree to have Veterans Park listed on the City’s Local Register of Historic Places.

Signed:

Attest:

Price Patton

Rhonda

Sexton

President, Delray Beach Preservation Trust

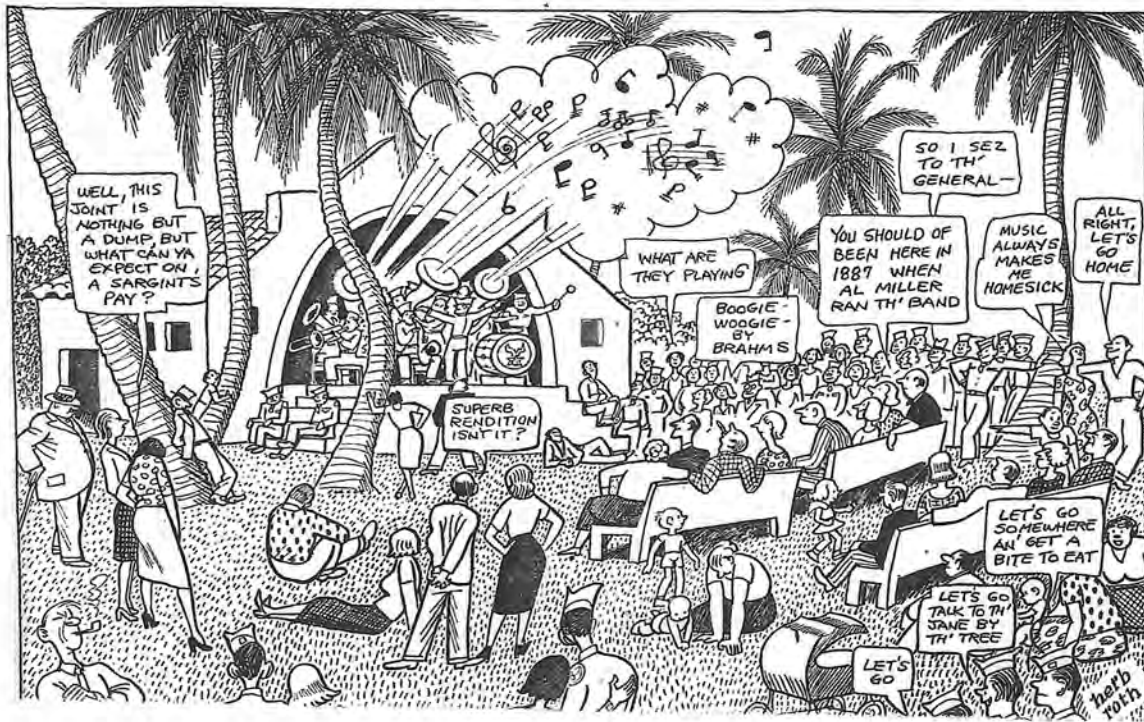
Secretary

X. PHOTOGRAPHY



The Women's Business Band performed at the park, then known as City Park in the 1920s, but disbanded during the Great Depression. The park was renamed Veterans Park in November, 1983. (Courtesy Delray Beach Historical Society).

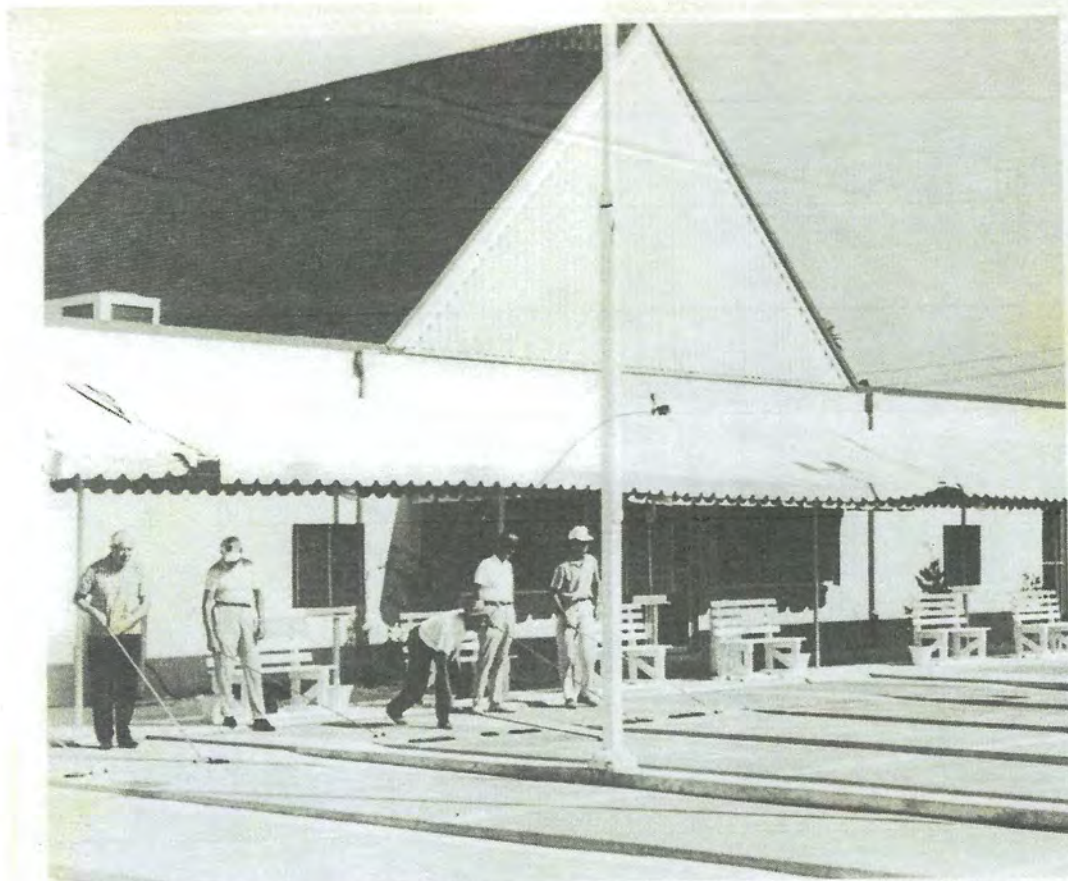
The Monthly Band Concert at the City Park Delray Beach, Flori
By Herb Roth



Famed cartoonist Herb Roth captured a Big Band concert in City Park in 1943. Note the uniformed military men. (Courtesy Delray Beach Historical Society).

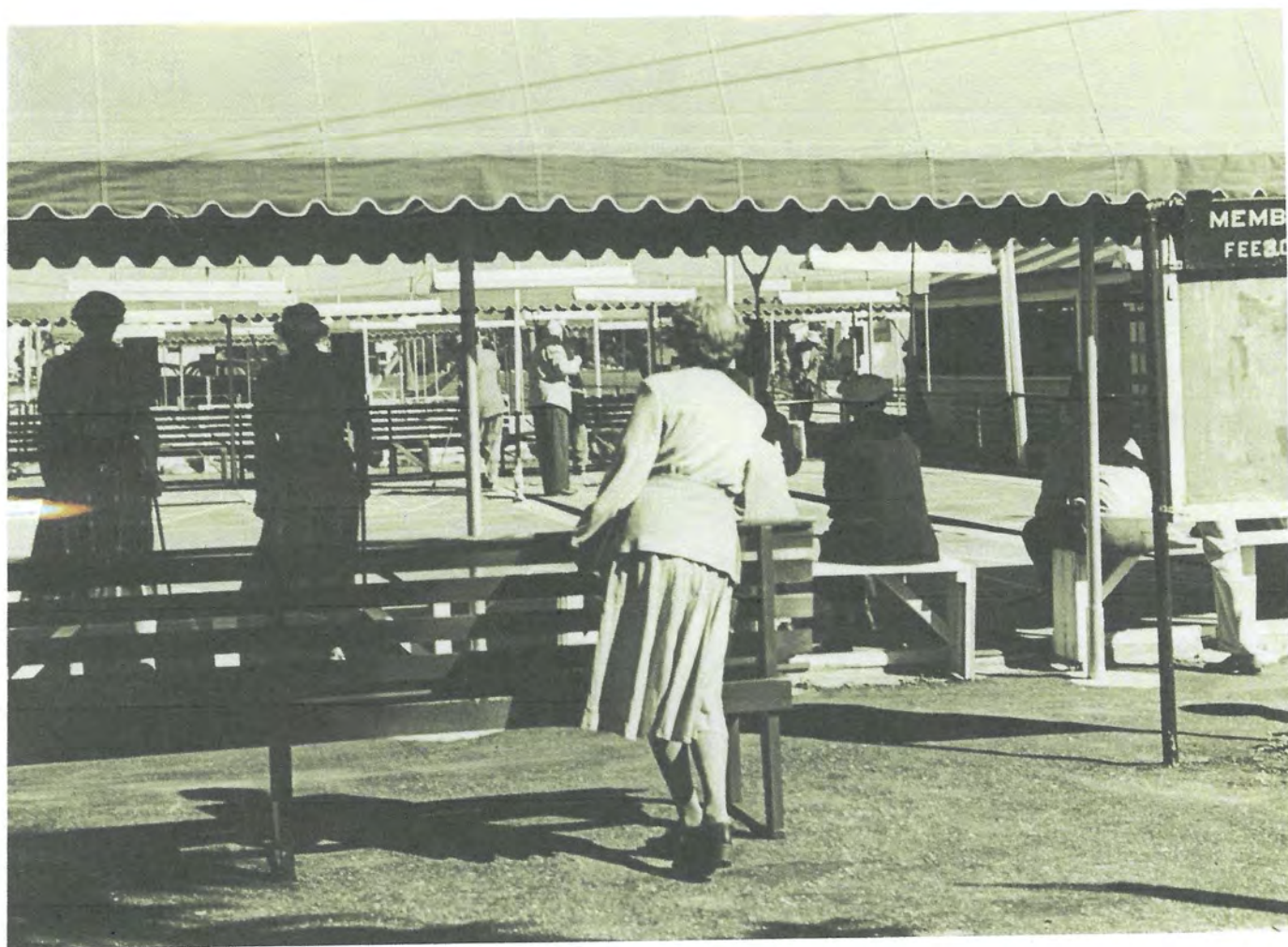


The 1947 War Memorial, seen in the early 1950s. (Courtesy Delray Beach Historical Society).



SENIOR CITIZENS COMPLEX, on banks of Intracoastal Waterway, provides shuffleboard courts, clubhouse with kitchen and all facilities and bowling on the green. Visitors are welcome and membership in organized activities is nominal. Facilities or city's Recreation Dept. are available to Complex.

The Recreation Center, designed by Delray Beach architect Kenneth Jacobsen, shown in 1968, two years after the facility opened. (Courtesy Delray Beach Historical Society).



Onlookers watch shuffleboard games in progress in 1968. (Courtesy Delray Beach Historical Society).