

JAN EISENHART



1935

Highlights from the extraordinary career of a former Park Board employee

- 1920** At 14 years of age, Jan (Oyvind) Eisenhardt wins Denmark's annual 13 km. Eremitage race.
- 1923-27** Eisenhardt majors in sports at the Lycee Clemenceau in Nantes, France, where he excels in gymnastics, fencing and tennis. He also plays professional level soccer with the Stuttgart Football Club and Olympique de Marseille.
- 1928** Emigrates to Canada on a scholarship to the University of British Columbia. Changes his name to Ian Eisenhardt. Employed by the Vancouver Park Board as a playground leader at MacLean Park in the City's Strathcona district.
- 1931** Appointed Supervisor of the Playground and Recreation Department of the Park Board. The hiring of an 'immigrant' for a senior civic position is vigorously opposed by the Native Sons of Canada.
- 1931-33** Organizes and leads a "Winter Fieldhouse" initiative, a year-round

extension of the Park Board's summer supervised playground program. Taking place in community halls, schools and church basements, the program provides affordable recreation activities for hundreds of children and youth across Vancouver at the outset of the Great Depression. Fifteen years later, this experiment will inspire a campaign for permanent community centre buildings in Vancouver.

•**1934** Appointed the first Director of the Recreation and Physical Education Branch of the Ministry of Education in Victoria. Eisenhardt is specifically recruited by Dr. G. M. Weir, Minister of Education, to develop a Province-wide fitness program on the model of the Park Board Winter Fieldhouse program. Known as Pro-Rec (short for Provincial Recreation), this free program aims at engaging young unemployed men and women in "wholesome recreation, body building and team sports." From 3,000 participants in 18 centres in its first year, Pro-Rec grows to over 27,000 participants and 174 centres by 1939, at which point Eisenhardt leaves Victoria for Ottawa. Pro-Rec continues until 1953 when it is dissolved and replaced by a new Branch of the Ministry providing consultant advice and grants-in-aid to local recreation commissions and school districts.

•**1939** At the outbreak of World War II, Eisenhardt enlists with Irish Fusiliers as a second lieutenant. Posted to Ottawa as Director of the Canadian Army Sports Program. Designs a physical fitness and sports program for the army with the slogan "To keep the fighting soldier fighting fit."

•**1943** Now with the rank of Major, Eisenhardt becomes National Director of Physical Fitness Canada.

•**1946?** Marries Barbara Ferdon, with whom he raises four children.

•**1947** Leaves active military service, remaining in the reserves, and is posted by the Federal Government to the United Nations, serving first as Director of Staff Activities in New York and then as Committee Secretary at UNESCO in Paris.

•**1950** Appointed Director of Sports and Games with the Department of Indian Affairs. Fired the same year for alleged Communist sympathies, and blacklisted from future public employment. Major Eisenhardt never again works in his chosen profession. He is 43 years old.

•**1999** After almost 50 years of obscurity, Eisenhardt is given a Lifetime Achievement Award by Sport Canada, and the Order of Canada, presented by then Governor General Romeo LeBlanc.

•**2000 Jun.** A still very fit Jan Eisenhardt joins 92,000 other runners to inaugurate a new bridge from Denmark to Sweden (photo below). After the 21 kilometer run, he declares he could have shaved another hour off his time of 4 hours, 20 minutes if he didn't stop to talk to his many admirers.

•**2000 Oct.** At the age of 94, Eisenhardt runs in the same Eremitage race he won as a 14 year old. He again finishes the 13 km course, but this time not in first place.



2000