

NVRPA Honors Walter L. Mess With Chairman Emeritus Title

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority Board named longtime chairman Walter L. Mess Chairman Emeritus in recognition of his founding role and 46 years of accomplishment and service with NVRPA. The Board honored its nationally acclaimed leader at a special workshop session in mid-January.

The second Chairman in the Authority's 46-year history, Mess stepped down as Board Chairman and City of Falls Church representative to the Board following his 90th birthday in December. He first accepted the gavel in 1975, succeeding the first chairman, ornithologist, author and conservationist Dr. Ira Gabrielson.

In the Authority's early years, the land economist and mortgage banker hiked each property the new agency considered acquiring. NVRPA now preserves more than 10,000 acres and operates 19 regional parks in the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church and the counties of Arlington, Fairfax and Loudoun.

He worked with fellow Northern Virginians in the 1950s to form the regional agency to plan, develop and operate a system of regional parks. Arlington and Fairfax counties and the City of Falls Church were the founding jurisdictions. In 1959, he was the City of Falls Church's first appointee to the Board. In 1999, NVRPA honored his 40 years of service by naming the agency headquarters, The Walter L. Mess Building.

"Starting with your original vision more than a half century ago, you worked to lay the authority's legal groundwork," David M. Pritzker, City of Alexandria NVRPA Board member, said at the workshop. "You generated community and legislative support and raised funds to give birth to the institution. Ever since, you have guided it with a combination of wisdom, political acumen, caring and just plain hard work to create a legacy that will live on far into the future.

"Your efforts have been recognized as a model for the entire nation," Pritzker added citing the National Recreation and Park Association's presentation of the 2004 National Voluntary Service Award to the new Chairman Emeritus.

Dr. C. Barrie Cook of the City of Fairfax, former Vice Chairman of the regional body, became acting Chairman until the Board holds elections at the January 27 Board meeting. The city council or county board of each member jurisdiction appoints two members to the Authority's governing board.

Current Board members are Pritzker and William C. Dickinson of the City of Alexandria; James I. Mayer and John G. Milliken of Arlington County; Dr. Cook and Arthur F. Little of the City of Fairfax; Paul A. Gilbert and Jean R. Packard of Fairfax County; Barry D. Buschow of the City of Falls Church; and Treasurer Joan B. Rokus and Su Webb of Loudoun County.