



KATHRYN KRIEG

A TRAILBLAZER & COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

Kathryn E. Krieg (1904–1999) was born in Indiana and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. While college education for women was still uncommon in the 1920s, Krieg was encouraged by a teacher to pursue higher education and in 1926 she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Physical Education from the University of Nebraska. She moved to New York City to complete the National Recreation Association's Leadership School. In 1928, Krieg returned to the Midwest accepting a temporary summer position with the Des Moines Playground Commission (now Des Moines Parks and Recreation). Just a few years later in 1931, she was named Superintendent of Recreation, launching a remarkable 46-year career.

Kathryn Krieg's influence extended beyond Des Moines. She co-founded and helped shape national organizations, including the American Recreation Society and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Her contributions earned her the NRPA's prestigious Fellow Award and multiple accolades at the state and local levels. Her ability to connect with people and understand their needs made her an exemplary leader and role model. In 2005, Krieg was posthumously inducted into the National Recreation and Park Association Hall of Fame.

Krieg was a trailblazer in the field of recreation, and one of the few women in her time in a senior administrative role. Known for her collaborative spirit, she worked closely with local groups in Des Moines, including schools. She was quoted, "I think all agencies, public and private, ought to work together." Dedicated to fostering joy and connection, Krieg was committed to enhancing community well-being. Her enduring impact is evident in the long list of contributions she made throughout her career. Below are just a few:

- Helped establish the local tradition of Beggars' Night in Des Moines
- Created some of the first programs in the country for children's playgrounds
- Operated Camp Dodge Swimming Pool (now closed), the second largest in the world at the time
- Organized training for thousands of volunteers through the Governor's Conference
- Maintained partnerships with the public schools through facility sharing
- Launched the largest adult softball program in the state at the time
- Introduced square dancing programs for adults needing a positive diversion during the Great Depression
- Oversaw Ewing Park Day Camp for kids to learn camping and outdoor recreation skills
- The Kathryn Krieg scholarship – covers annual expenses of a parks and recreational professional within the State of Iowa to attend national professional development opportunities

“MAKE UP YOUR MINDS THAT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING. LIKE PEOPLE AND LEARN HOW TO WORK WITH PEOPLE.”

– Kathryn Krieg



A 46-Year Temporary Job

Kathryn Krieg's Distinguished Career in D.M. Recreation



TRICKS TO TREATS

THE ORIGIN OF BEGGARS' NIGHT

In the late 1930s, Krieg helped tackle a growing concern in Des Moines: Halloween pranks often turning into police calls. More than 500 calls were reported to the Des Moines Police Department on Halloween night 1938. She collaborated with the Community Chest of Des Moines (now United Way) to reimagine the holiday. She proposed designating October 30 as “Beggars’ Night”, a night where children would perform a song, poem, or stunt only after saying “tricks-for-eats” to earn their treats.

During the Second World War, public initiatives in schools and newsprint emphasized conserving resources on the homefront. Even Kathryn Krieg, while supporting Beggars’ Night, reminded families “food not be wasted.” After the new Beggars’ Night establishment, youth vandalism and pranks declined significantly by the mid-1940s.

This idea was emblematic of Krieg’s ability to work with the local community to see an issue and create with a collaborative solution. Krieg passed away in 1999, but her legacy of transforming Halloween in Des Moines lives on through a uniquely local and beloved tradition of replacing mischief with laughter.



▲ Des Moines Register articles encouraging children to help the war effort by not wasting materials.

