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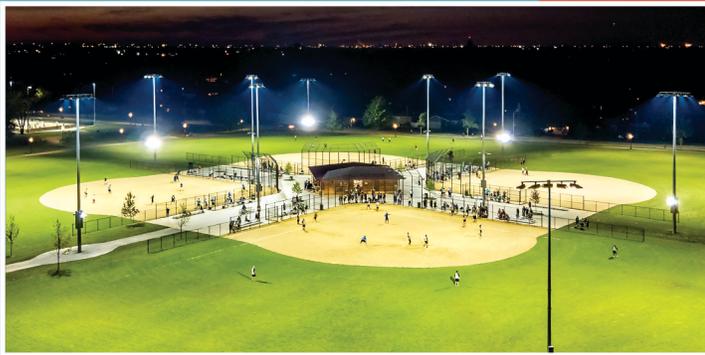
PARKS AND RECREATION

The magazine of the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association



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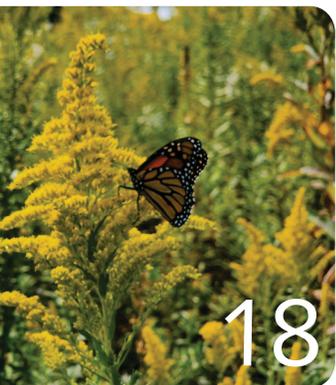
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FROM THE EDITOR

Securing the future by protecting today



When someone thinks about the work a park district, forest preserve, conservation, recreation or special recreation does for a community, its often viewed through the lens of events or services or just open space. However, those of us in this field know that our agencies are also stewards of good environmental practices.

Your agencies are tirelessly looking for ways to be more environmentally friendly. There are so many ways that work is being done. Solar energy, sustainability, recycling, and battling invasive species are just a few ways that agencies throughout Illinois utilize green efforts to make sure this beautiful state is maintained for generations to come.

No project is too large or too small when it comes to protecting our environment and I hope some of the stories we share in this issue inspire you to expand your efforts to going green.

This issue explores a variety of green efforts, beginning with a deep dive into the incredible eco-friendly world of the Naperville Park District on page 18. We take a look at how to leverage solar energy with the Park District of Oak Park on page 22. The St. Charles Park District shines a light on preserving natural areas and getting residents involved on page 14. Finally, Ameren shares details on how it worked with the Champaign Park District to improve its lighting, both in quality and cost.

Kermit the Frog has been quoted as saying, "It's not easy being green." That just means we have to keep working hard to stay green!
Thanks for reading!

— Wayne Utterback, Editor

Photo credit: Cover photo by Danielle Spence of the West Chicago Park District, submitted for the 2022 Give Us Your Best Shot Photo Contest.



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We provide services, solutions, ideas and advice to protect your district, so you can feel confident in providing a safe place for your community.



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Working with members who have adopted the proactive risk management culture of our membership

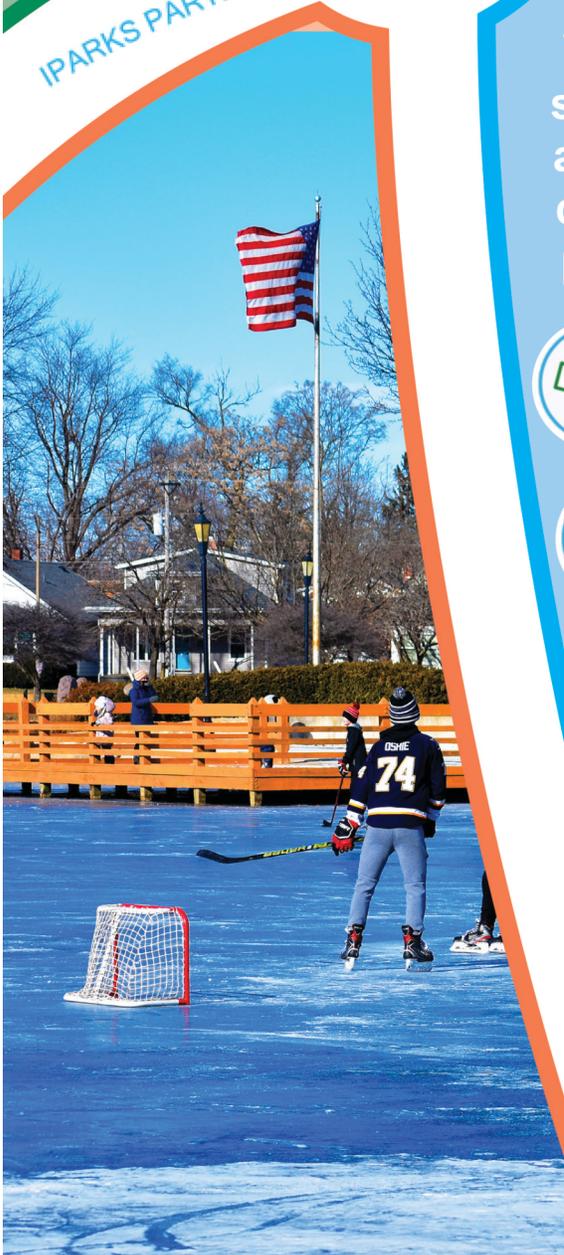


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Photos courtesy of: Pekin Park District





Peter M. Murphy, Esq., CAE, IOM
IAPD President and CEO

IAPD Carries Momentum Into the New Year

The year 2023 marks the Illinois Association of Park Districts' **95th year of service** to park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies. With more than four decades of service to IAPD, I am truly honored to lead the nation's oldest and most successful statewide association for parks, recreation, and conservation.

Albert Einstein said that the only source of knowledge is experience, and our membership can rest assured that they are being led by the best and the brightest with a wealth of knowledge gained by centuries of experience. The IAPD staff has a combined total of **148 years** of association experience serving our outstanding membership, and our Board of Trustees has a combined **310 years** of experience in this incredible field!

That's a lot of knowledge, and it enabled us to do amazing things in 2022. Below is a sampling of our 2022 achievements.

- Teamwork with our membership combined with our finely tuned legislative advocacy skills resulted in **a historic \$56 million** appropriated for new Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development program grants in the state budget. More than 200 applications were submitted for the 2023 fiscal year, with a total request of **\$104,268,503**.
- IAPD worked diligently to establish this grant program in the 1980s, and I am proud to have played a role in one of our greatest legislative accomplishments which occurred in 1989 when we advocated for legislation to give OSLAD a dedicated source of funding, which was a portion of the real estate transfer tax. IAPD continues to educate the Illinois General Assembly about the critical importance of supporting this essential program, which enables our membership to advance their goals and improve the quality of life for their residents.

- We distributed **\$43,000 in PowerPlay! grants** to our member agencies in 2022, providing funding to create or enhance beyond-school programs promoting health, fitness, and nutrition. This program is funded by the *Park District Youth License Plate*, and throughout the past decade, we have provided grants to nearly 400 member agencies totaling \$389,000 which benefitted more than 51,000 children.

- Our 2022 *Legal Symposium* shattered attendance records with **383 in-person and virtual attendees** connecting with top legal experts who guided them through cutting-edge legal topics and important updates including addressing employee mental health conditions; using intergovernmental cooperation to your advantage while avoiding legal pitfalls; procedures for regulating vandalism, drugs, violence, and other illicit activity in parks and facilities; facilitation of protests, promotions, and public gatherings in parks; and more.

"In the new year, never forget to thank your past years because they enabled you to reach today. Without the stairs of the past, you cannot arrive at the future!"

- Mehmet Murat ildan



- **More than 90% of IAPD members** participated in our 2022 programs, including our complimentary webinars about the election process and racial equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- IAPD's *Boot Camp*, a staple educational session for orienting new commissioners and refreshing seasoned commissioners and professionals, was made available virtually this year providing access to this great content for dozens of members. This premier educational program fulfills the one-time Open Meetings Act training certification required for all newly elected officials.

- We sent **27 Legislative Updates and Legal News** to keep members up to date on news from the State Capitol, grant information, new legal requirements, election information, and other legal/legislative developments.

- Our **cutting-edge research study, Key Metric Agency Data Results**, aggregated the services, facilities, open space, investment/spending, and other financial information of 146 participating agencies into a database for use in drawing benchmark comparisons with similar agencies. IAPD also produced a five-panel brochure featuring key findings from this study.

- We published the **2023 Election Calendar**, which contains important dates and other information related to the 2023 Consolidated Elections. This useful resource was made available in both hard copy and digital form.

- IAPD staff reviewed each of the **3,037 bills** that were introduced this calendar year along with **1,100 amendments**. We are also tracking **1,121 bills** for their impact on member agencies.

- Our 2022 **Virtual Parks Day at the Capitol Spring Showcase** gave member park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation, and special recreation agencies the unique opportunity to showcase the 'crown jewel' of their parks, programs, or facilities to members of the Illinois General Assembly. Twenty-nine member agencies created videos which received **more than 1,000 views**.

- IAPD's 16th annual **Best of the Best Awards Gala** brought 239 guests together for an inspirational evening celebrating IAPD member agencies, commissioners, businesses, media, partners, and citizen volunteers who contribute their time, talents, and resources to supporting the park, recreation, and conservation mission. Highlights of the evening included recognition of a commissioner serving his agency for 50 years and a 100-year-old volunteer who attributed her longevity to her active involvement in her park district.

- Our 2022 episodes of our podcast, **Park Cast** - which shines the spotlight on the work that IAPD is doing in partnership with our members to advance parks, recreation, and conservation – had **20 new episodes** with **1,769 listens**.

- Our money-saving programs and grants continued to thrive in 2022 with **82%** of our members using services provided by at least one of our six affinity programs.

- IAPD's Board Development and Self-Evaluation Program provided boards with specialized guidance in defining roles and responsibilities, describing duties for oversight and governance, and determining leadership within their agencies. **Eighty-six board self-evaluations have been completed to date.**

- We published the **8th edition of the Illinois Park District Law Handbook**, which consolidates the body of complex laws impacting park districts into a single, user-friendly volume that explains these statutes, codes, and regulations in layman's terms. This new edition contains 23 legal sample forms and was made available electronically for the first time ever.

- Fifty commissioners have reached the highest level in IAPD's **Board Member Development Program** – Master Board Members. This program inspires board members throughout the state to track accomplishments made during terms on their local board and rewards them with statewide recognition.

- Our esteemed Director Search program remained popular among agencies seeking to hire an executive. IAPD has placed **142** professionals since the program's inception.

- IAPD staff responded to nearly **400 legal inquiries** from our members on a range of issues including those related to COVID-19.

- We published the **2022 Buyers' Guide, a 44-page comprehensive directory** of businesses that provide essential goods and services to member agencies.

- Our engaging website served as an excellent resource for members this year, with **16,196 unique visitors** and **90,378 pageviews**.

I encourage you to read your 2022 IAPD Annual Report in its entirety to see the full scope of our commitment, dedication, and service to you, our valued membership.

As we embark upon this new year and look back on our many triumphs of 2022, we are confident that the stairs of our past are taking us to a bright future brimming with even more successes. We are grateful to be making the climb with those of you who represent the best park, recreation, and conservation agencies in the nation!

On behalf of the IAPD Board of Trustees and staff, we wish you and your families a wonderful new year filled with health and happiness.



By Barbara Arango, CAE
IPRA Executive Director

Ode to the IPRA Family

2022 flew right by
After jumping in and soaring high.
I learned so much along the way
And met great new friends every day.

The IPRA team is strong and tough
And I can't express my thanks enough
For a Board of Directors that is beyond compare
A group whose greatness is truly rare.

Thank you Doug, Trisha, Lisa, and Andrew
Derek, Keith, Erika, Matt and Andrew.
Your dedication is inspiring to see
And you have undying appreciation from me.

Another Board must be thanked as well
For supporting our community as you can tell.
Our foundation trustees work hard for you
And provide support for all you do.

Thank you Jarrod, Carlo, Bill, Joan and Mike.
John, John, Ray, Cam, Dave, Tracey and Mike.
Last year was a great one in case you didn't hear
Just wait until you see what's in store for next year!

My next round of thanks goes to a team
That pulled off a feat one could say was extreme.
The program committee put together a show...
That blew attendees away as you surely know.

Last but not least is my staff at HQ
We care for each other and love what we do.
Heather, Barry, Duane and Kim – the OGs
Add Cindy, Nicole and Vince – what a team!

Thanks for bearing with my corny ode to this group
But I think you'll agree they deserve a "Whoop!
Whoop!"

I can't wait to see what this next year will be
And continue to add to the IPRA family!

Thank you to the 2022 IPRA Board of Directors

Chair: Trisha Breitlow, CPRP, CTRS

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Thank you to the IPRA members of the Joint Conference Committee

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And thank you to all our amazing volunteers in the sections, on boards of regents, on the Membership Council, on various committees and at our events. Your dedication is what makes this community so incredible, and we appreciate each and every one of you!



Skills Development Webinar Series

- One time registration includes **monthly login & access** to all 2023 recorded webinars
- All participants may earn up to **1.1 CEUs**
- Topics include: **Moving from Best Practice to Next Practice, What's New in Marketing?**, and **Researching What Matters**
- Register at ILipra.org




SATURDAY, JULY 15, 2023

Unplug Illinois Day

Plan to Participate!




4 hours

43% of Americans aged 18-29 use their smartphones for four hours per day.
(CDC)

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unplugillinois.org



By Duane Smith, CPRP
IPRA Education Director

iLearn for Sustainability

When you hear the term sustainability, you likely think of green initiatives and eco-friendly practices designed to protect and preserve the use of our world's natural resources for many generations to come. As a practitioner in the industry of parks, recreation, and conservation, you are generally perceived as a champion of environmental sustainability and a steward in building healthy, educated communities connected to their natural environment. This is both a great honor and a great responsibility that requires a steadfast dedication to continuous learning and a unique skillset that allows one to be adaptable in a changing environment.

As a former practitioner, I like to think of the park, recreation, and conservation professional as a generalist, or a jack-of-all-trades. Certainly, you each possess specific skills and excel in certain specialties, but it's a fact that everyone in this industry is expected to be flexible and knowledgeable across multiple disciplines. For those offended by my observation, I'd like you to know that William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, held this very same distinction. Not only was he a playwright, he also helped with the stage set and costume development, and it's known that he even tried to memorize character lines for rehearsal and direct some of his plays. Despite any negative connotations that come to mind, being a generalist is actually a positive thing because it signifies an unquenchable thirst for self-discovery. In parks and recreation, it means a knowledge of concepts across multiple departments and a devotion to learning new ideas and skills that will not only help one better adapt to the dynamic needs of the community, but also aid in becoming a more proficient and respected leader.

IPRA's iLearn program embodies the generalist mindset and encourages participants to indulge in professional discovery about a trending topic unrelated to their specialties but relevant to the industry of parks, recreation, and conservation. It's designed to improve one's ability to

collaborate with colleagues on a project, conduct research using leading-expert resources, and educate peers on the findings. This is an important skill set that allows one to effectively onboard leadership teams to certain ideas and concepts, and it has the potential to help elevate oneself into a higher-level leadership position where this is a prerequisite for long-term success. While iLearn has taken on a different format, many professionals, including myself, have benefited from this unique opportunity.

Thanks to the ingenuity of iLearn Committee Chair Deanna Angelini Johann (Gurnee Park District) and committee members Kayla Lindgren (Park District of Oak Park) and Conor Cahill (Rolling Meadows Park District), this program is now a student-focused competition designed to introduce future industry leaders to IPRA and provide an opportunity to showcase their developing skills to future employers. The objective of this year's competition was for each team to research sustainability practices and develop a mock project proposal that would help a park district fulfill its master plan initiative to improve the agency's sustainability efforts by 20%. Congratulations to Daniel Castree, Nicole Dudek, Nona McCullum, and Joe Riley from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, as their proposal to install bioswales, rain gardens, and trees won over the hearts and minds of the iLearn judges. These students will be attending the 2023 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference on a student scholarship to showcase their project and meet practitioners across Illinois.

Adopting an "iLearn" mindset will undoubtedly help you refine your jack-of-all-trade abilities and sustain a successful career in parks, recreation, and conservation. While it is my hope you continue to excel in your specialty, remember to continue developing in other areas so your work will reach many more people in the community. And the next time you hear the phrase, "Jack of all trades, master of none", smile and remind yourself that as a professional in the distinguished industry of parks, recreation, and conservation, you are "oftentimes better than the master of one".



IPRF is the Leader in Workers' Compensation Coverage

Since our inception in 1985, the Illinois Public Risk Fund has invited public entities and government agencies to examine our outstanding record for cost-effective workers' compensation coverage. Today, over 700 risk managers rely on IPRF for:

- 24/7/365 Claim Reporting
- In-house Nurse Case Management
- Aggressive subrogation program which will include members out of pocket expenses.
- Loss Control training and support that includes an extensive library of online training courses, simulator training and sample safety guides.
- IPRF members can select their own defense counsel subject to IPRF's litigation management process and approval.
- Dedicated Claims Team
- Prescription Drug Programs



Jason Anselment
General Counsel

Take Advantage of Legislative Awareness Opportunities in the Coming Months

The new 103rd Illinois General Assembly commenced with the inauguration of members on January 11, 2023.

There are numerous changes this year, including at least 32 new legislators in the House and Senate. Additionally, some IAPD member agencies are now represented by different legislators than last year because of redistricting, which occurs once every ten years.

In response to these changes, IAPD has developed numerous resources to assist in our advocacy efforts. For example, the IAPD website contains access to new legislative maps and other resources while the IAPD database has also been updated to reflect the new legislative boundaries and updated legislator contact information.

With lawmakers returning to the Capitol, we have been visiting with our legislative champions to reaffirm our existing relationships. We have also begun meeting personally with new representatives and senators to build new relationships and to deliver a welcome packet that contains important information regarding the benefits of local park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies and key contacts for each agency within their legislative district.

Relationships are the foundation of IAPD's success at the Capitol, and your agency plays a vital role in that effort. If history is any guide, many of you have already started connecting with legislators who are new to your agency. For those who may be looking for ways to introduce themselves and their agency, or to develop existing relationships, there are several opportunities in the coming months.

1. Invite Your Legislators to Join You at the IAPD/IPRA Awards Luncheon

The IAPD/IPRA All-Conference Awards Luncheon is a premier event that showcases the positive impact park and recreation

agencies have within individual communities and across the state. The stories and accomplishments highlighted at this event are not only an inspiration to those within the profession, but they also have an enormous impact on those legislators in attendance as well. There may be no better occasion than the All-Conference Awards Luncheon to obtain respect and understanding for the work that you do and for your agency's significance to your community.

The Outstanding Legislators of the Year are also recognized during the luncheon. The winning legislators are always appreciative of sharing the occasion with as many of their peers as possible, and the prestigious award is an achievement for which many legislators eagerly strive.

If you have not already done so, make a lasting impression by inviting your legislator to accompany you to the All-Conference Awards Luncheon on January 27, 2023.

2. Join Your Legislators at a Legislative Breakfast

Because of the pandemic and the accelerated 2022 legislative session schedule, the Legislative Breakfast program was confined to a virtual format the past two years. This year, we are very excited to be back in person at 12 different sites. The Joint Legislative Committee has coordinated these important events to offer a venue for member agencies to hear from legislators, deliver positive messages about their agencies, and discuss the Legislative Platform.

Do not miss this opportunity to connect with your legislators back in their legislative district during the months of February and March. Event details are at the end of this article, so please find a Legislative Breakfast location near you and encourage your legislator to attend.

3. Invite Your Legislators to Your Facilities

With so many new faces and the reality that the pandemic curtailed many programs and services, it is critical to invite your legislators to see firsthand all that your agency does to improve the quality of life within your community. Because your agency provides so many programs and services, it is possible that your legislators may not be aware of all that your agency offers. One of the best ways to raise awareness is to give your legislators a personalized tour of your facilities. This would afford an opportunity to explain the programs you deliver to residents and the role your legislator can play in helping you. For example, the impact of unfunded mandates and the capital needs that exist at your agency can be more easily demonstrated during legislator site visits. As previously mentioned, IAPD has developed a welcome packet with useful information about the benefits of parks and recreation, but you should consider developing your own packet specific to your agency.

4. Attend Events at the Capitol

While the Legislative Conference, Legislative Reception, and Parks Day at the Capitol are still several months away, mark your calendars to attend. After connecting with your legislators locally at a Legislative Breakfast and at your facilities, May 2-3 will be the perfect time to reconnect with them at the Capitol during the final month of the Spring Session.

These are just a few ways you can build important relationships with your legislators in the coming months. Obviously, it is important to update your mailing lists to make sure legislators are receiving information about the programs and services your agency offers to residents. Legislators welcome information about events within their legislative districts, so make sure your legislator receives your calendar of events and, when appropriate, invite them to attend events.

Part of IAPD's proud history is the strength of its grassroots advocacy program. To continue this tradition, it is important that each new member of the General Assembly understands the positive impact that park, recreation, and conservation agencies have within the communities they represent.

IAPD is counting on you to help us develop strong relationships with the dozens of new members of the General Assembly. Do not wait to start this process. Our legislative success depends upon each of you!

2023 SPRING SESSION IAPD LEGISLATIVE AWARENESS SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

The 103rd General Assembly's Spring Session officially began on January 11, 2023. Key deadlines and other important dates are available on the IAPD website at ILparks.org as well as the General Assembly's website at ilga.gov.

There will be numerous opportunities throughout the Spring Session to meet with legislators to discuss important legislative issues and to deliver positive messages about the benefits of parks, recreation, and conservation. Please mark your calendar to attend these events and invite your legislators to join you.

January 27	Soaring to New Heights All-Conference Awards Luncheon
February 10	Legislative Breakfast Skokie Park District
February 17	Legislative Breakfast Tinley Park-Park District Legislative Breakfast Fox Valley Special Recreation Association
February 27	Legislative Breakfast Urbana Park District
March 3	Legislative Breakfast Gurnee Park District
March 4	Legislative Breakfast Schaumburg Park District
March 13	Legislative Breakfast Southern Illinois Agencies via Zoom
March 14	Legislative Breakfast Springfield Park District
March 17	Legislative Breakfast Bloomingdale Park District Legislative Breakfast West Suburban Special Recreation Association / Park District of Forest Park
March 20	Legislative Breakfast Geneseo Park District
March 27	Legislative Breakfast Chillicothe Park District
May 2	Parks Day at the Capitol State Capitol, Springfield Legislative Reception Illini Country Club, Springfield
May 3	Legislative Conference Crowne Plaza, Springfield



PRESERVING LAND & ECOSYSTEMS IN ILLINOIS

BY **ERIKA YOUNG**, PR & MARKETING MANAGER, ST. CHARLES PARK DISTRICT

Those immortal words from the literary and cinematic classic, *Gone with the Wind*, may have referred to a plantation in Georgia, but they are just as appropriate today in the field of ecological restoration and in fact often are quoted at the St. Charles Park District.



**“LAND IS THE ONLY THING IN THE WORLD
WORTH WORKING FOR... BECAUSE IT’S THE
ONLY THING THAT LASTS.”**

- GERALD O'HARA

Although widely known for its superbly maintained athletic fields, its innovative aquatic centers and its novel playgrounds and recreation programs, St. Charles distinguishes itself among park districts in its commitment to preserving land, and the ecosystems, that define northeastern Illinois. This dedication is evident throughout the organization, from its Master Plan that guides administrative decisions to the staff responsible for restoring the native vegetation and to the education programs that provide residents with the knowledge they need to foster native plants in their own yards and neighborhoods.

Preserving natural areas is the ultimate green practice thanks to its conservation of resources across many fronts. By not planting turf grass, the park district saves not only the labor required for weekly mowing but also reduces the emissions of gas-powered mowers and other turf maintenance equipment. It saves on fertilizer application because native plants acquire their nutrients through deep roots adapted to local soil types. And it saves water because established native plants do not require irrigation, even in times of low rainfall.

The park district's current inventory lists 11 natural areas totaling a little more than 400 acres. They extend from the 123-acre Hickory Knolls Natural Area, a diverse, regionally recognized parcel consisting of prairie, woods and marsh to the biologically diverse Royal Fox Wetland, which at just 3.8 acres is the park district's smallest conservancy plot yet provides vital habitat for rare and endangered species.

To conserve the biological integrity of these holdings, the district employs three ecological restoration technicians but also relies heavily on the contributions of dedicated volunteers. These individuals, some of whom have given their Saturday mornings to restoration work days for more than 20 years, aid in the removal of invasive species, the harvesting of native seeds, and the propagation of plants that will improve the diversity of native species within the natural areas. Last year, this naturalist team propagated 23,125 native plants, which would have cost more than \$50,000 in plant material had it been purchased, while natural area volunteers logged more than 1,400 hours in the field planted 34,309 native plants back into the natural

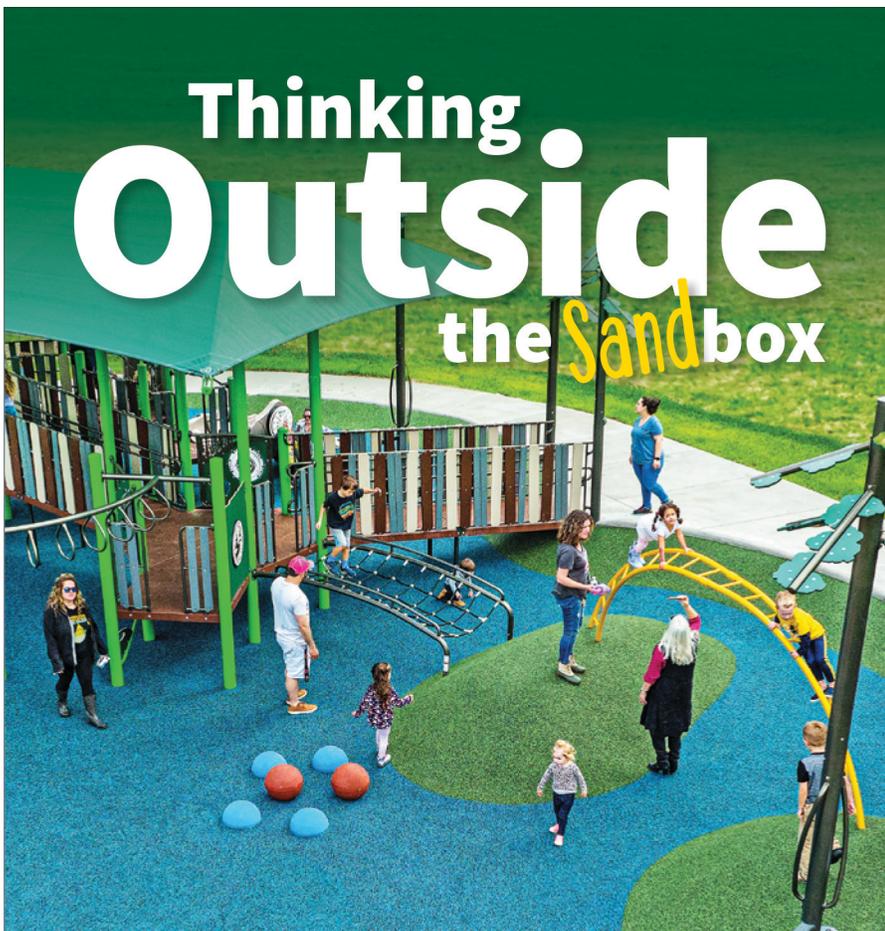
areas. Restoration efforts resulted in the removal of 571 large trees thus clearing 5.75 acres of invasive species from natural areas which resulted in 45.5 chipper truckloads of bark used in planting beds and along trails.

Two natural areas, Ferson Creek Fen and Norris Woods, have been awarded Nature Preserve status by the Illinois Nature Preserve Commission, a division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Totalling 119 acres, these two preserves contain vital habitat for rare and endangered plants and wildlife and are permanently protected by state law. The district works closely with the Preserve Commission to provide stewardship, management and protection for these unique lands. In fact, a new cooperative genetic enhancement program was developed in 2022. The ultimate goal of the intergovernmental partnership was to establish relationships with like organizations to enhance struggling plant genetics specifically at Ferson Creek Fen, where rare plants continue to be discovered as proper conditions are restored.

To ensure that the community understands and fully appreciates these tremendous natural assets, the district employs a naturalist education staff that leads classes and creates interpretive materials that explain the role natural

areas play in daily life. An annual partnership with local school districts further extends this message to more than 1,200 students in kindergarten through high school when they take field trips to specific natural areas. A different partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Kane County and the Geneva Park District—the Kane County Certified Naturalist program—has produced nearly 300 natural areas enthusiasts since its inception in 2007. And Outreach Ambassador Pam Otto was featured five times this year on WGN-TV as the expert Nature Nerd highlighting local animals, reptiles and insects.

The Spring Ephemerals community science program in its second year gained great momentum when the number of total observations grew six times larger from 340 in 2021 to 2,101 in 2022. The number of volunteers also significantly increased up to 253 people reporting ephemeral sightings in regional natural areas via the iNaturalist app. As part of this and other restoration processes, many delightful native species have been inventoried, and two rare species have been discovered – the federally endangered Leafy Prairie Clover in 2021 and the highly conservative Swamp Saxifrage in 2022. Both species are being protected as well as replanted with expectations to flourish for future generations.



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Even St. Charles service organizations understand the importance of green efforts and appreciate the community's natural assets. The district partners with the River Corridor Foundation on Fox River clean ups and annual native plantings in park settings for pollinators and beautification. Last year, the St. Charles Breakfast Rotary helped establish a Monarch Waystation Garden featuring native species attractive to this migratory butterfly near Hickory Knolls Discovery Center.

In July 2022, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature identified the monarch as endangered due to loss of habitat along its migration route. To educate others about the importance of monarchs and other butterflies, and what can be done to help them, nature expert Pam Otto hosts a monarch event aboard the district's paddlewheel riverboat each summer. For families, she offers the Riverboat Eco Float, a program where participants learn about nature's sights and sounds along the Fox River while sipping root beer floats.

At the annual Native Plant Sale every June, naturalists are on site to answer any questions to educate customers on what plants can be used locally to benefit the community. Native plants reduce air pollution, require less water,

bloom every year and provide food and shelter for birds, bees, butterflies and more. In 2022, this sale grossed more than \$16,000.

The district has two native plant gardens for people to visit throughout the year to see what's blooming. More than just a leisurely stroll, these self-guided tours let visitors discover plants that thrive under local growing conditions and help guide decisions about what plants they might like to add to their own home landscape.

Through thoughtful acquisitions steered by the district's Master Plan, St. Charles' natural areas are distributed in such a way as to provide green corridors for wildlife as well as easy access for residents.

In community surveys, residents consistently rank the district's parks and trails as its highest strength. Repeatedly, residents remark that the 20+ miles of scenic trails in and alongside the woods and prairies, are accessible and highly beneficial for physical and mental well-being. And that's music to the district's ears, as its mission is to enrich the quality of life through excellence in programs, parks, facilities and services.

CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT - DESIGN BUILD



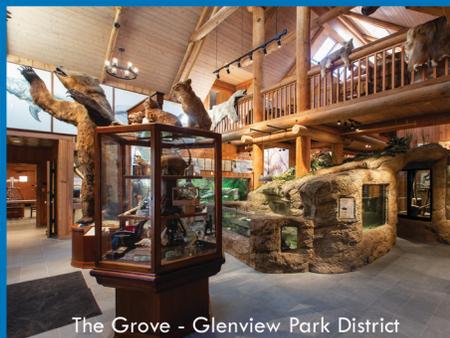
Elk Grove Park District



Fox Run Golf Links



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The Grove - Glenview Park District



New Construction



Additions / Renovations



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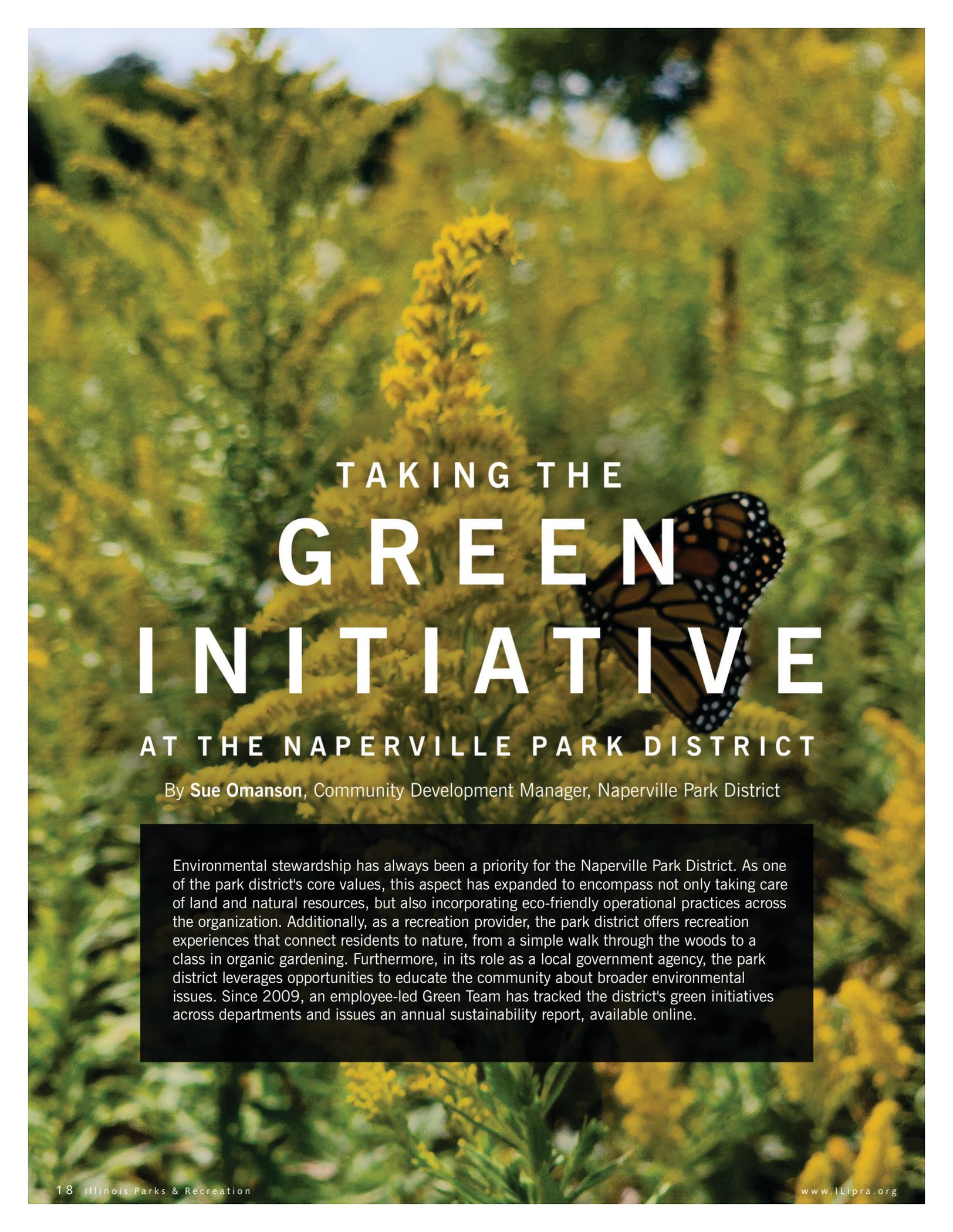
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TAKING THE GREEN INITIATIVE

AT THE NAPERVILLE PARK DISTRICT

By **Sue Omanson**, Community Development Manager, Naperville Park District

Environmental stewardship has always been a priority for the Naperville Park District. As one of the park district's core values, this aspect has expanded to encompass not only taking care of land and natural resources, but also incorporating eco-friendly operational practices across the organization. Additionally, as a recreation provider, the park district offers recreation experiences that connect residents to nature, from a simple walk through the woods to a class in organic gardening. Furthermore, in its role as a local government agency, the park district leverages opportunities to educate the community about broader environmental issues. Since 2009, an employee-led Green Team has tracked the district's green initiatives across departments and issues an annual sustainability report, available online.



STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL AREAS

Prior to its rapid development in the 1970s-1990s, Naperville was a farming community, where most of the open space was farmland with pockets of woodlands. The main geographic feature in Naperville is the DuPage River, with the West Branch flowing through downtown Naperville and the East Branch joining the West Branch at Knoch Knolls Park, on the southeast side of town. Through grants, partnerships and staff leadership, the Naperville Park District began restoring some of its parkland to the natural habitats that existed prior to agricultural use, including woodland, savannah, prairie and wetland. Restoration efforts also target the DuPage River, its tributaries and the many ponds on park district property.

Pioneer Park is an example of prairie, woodland and wetland restoration in a 12-acre area along the West Branch of the DuPage River. The park district began removing invasives and planting native trees, prairie seed and wetland plants in 2007 with a C-2000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Restoration work continued in 2012 with a Section 319 grant from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. This work included removing invasives, planting native wetland plants along the banks of the West Branch of the DuPage River and stabilizing the river banks to minimize erosion. Today, the prairie that was originally planted in 2007 is thriving and the woodland features native oaks and walnut trees with a healthy understory where native flowers can

bloom. The wetland has proven more difficult to manage, with invasive reed canary grass seeds flowing downstream to Pioneer Park. However, the riverbank remains stable and has more native plants than prior to the restoration and staff continues to manage the site to minimize invasive plants.

Earlier in its history, Naperville Park District acquired parkland that included retention ponds, but no longer accepts retention ponds as parkland donations. The park district currently manages 28 retention ponds and seeks to maintain and improve the health and function of the ponds both for stormwater management and as habitats for plants, fish and other wildlife. A recent pond restoration project at Brook Crossings is an example of both shoreline stabilization and pond dredging.

When park district staff and consultants evaluated the pond at Brook Crossings in 2020, they found that the shoreline had extensive erosion, filling the pond with silt. It was so shallow in some areas that geese could walk in it. Additionally, the pond had lost some of its ability to hold stormwater, and the water quality was poor. The park district began the restoration process in summer 2021 by clearing the invasive alder trees along the south and east shoreline. The next step in the project was to remove the silt that had accumulated over the years and to find a location for the dredged soil. The park district was able to



transport the soil to Frontier Sports Complex, where it was used to form a berm along the south side of the maintenance building near the Book Road entrance. The berm was planted with native vegetation to provide habitat for pollinators.

The pond shoreline was then graded to create a gentle slope and planted with native plants. Unlike the woody roots of trees, the roots of these native plants create a deep, fibrous matrix to hold the soil in place. The root system also absorbs pollutants from stormwater runoff before it enters the pond, thereby protecting the water quality. Shoreline restoration will continue in 2023 with work planned for the west side of the pond.

The 2021 dredging project increased the depth of the pond by 6 feet, creating a healthier environment for fish and amphibians and restoring its full size and beauty. The native plants along the shoreline will improve water quality by reducing the amount of silt filling the pond. The deeper pond will be able to retain more stormwater, helping to prevent flooding, as designed.

EDUCATING AND INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Natural area restoration work requires communication with residents who live near the parks where work is being done. Anticipating residents' concerns about removing invasive trees and shrubs, the park district sends letters to homes located near the affected parks, posts signs in the parks, sends press releases and updates social media—all with links or QR codes to access educational content on

the park district's website. Staff also answers residents' questions via phone and email.

In addition to project-related communication, the park district collaborates with other organizations to educate the community about environmental topics such as respecting wildlife, composting, protecting pollinators, energy efficiency and planting native plants. The park district hosts an annual Earth Day Fair and collaborates with several other local organizations to promote Earth Week; this endeavor includes volunteer projects, an Arbor Day tree sale, a rain barrel sale, and other special events. The park district involves more than 800 volunteers in park maintenance projects in a typical year, and hosts a pumpkin composting event and holiday lights recycling initiative.

INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY IN OUR OPERATIONS

The Naperville Park District follows four main principles of environmental sustainability in its operations. These include:

- Purchase and use of environmentally safe and sensitive products
- Protection of air, water, soil and wildlife
- Effective use of energy resources
- Reduction and handling of waste

Under principle 1, for example, the park district uses 30% recycled content office paper and green cleaning products at all facilities. Following principle 2, the park district conserves water through a cistern at Knoch Knolls Nature

Center and uses rain sensors at sports complexes to minimize irrigation, applies organic fertilizers when feasible and top dresses some fields with leaf and landscape compost. Under principle 3, the park district is replacing gas- or diesel-powered vehicles and equipment with electric or hybrid vehicles and equipment, continues to upgrade sports lighting to energy-efficient LED lighting and maintains 3 arrays of solar panels. Consistent with principle 4, the park district places recycling bins next to trash containers in parks and recycles approximately 35% of its total waste annually. Additionally, staff recycles engine oil, pallets, tires, metal and electronic equipment.

PROVIDING RECREATION EXPERIENCES TO CONNECT WITH NATURE

The opening of Knoch Knolls Nature Center in 2014 was an exciting step in offering nature experiences for the community. The Nature Center overlooks a pond and is just a few hundred feet away from the West Branch of the DuPage River at Knoch Knolls Park, home to one of the park district's largest natural areas with woodland and prairie habitats to explore. Toadstools and Pollywogs nature preschool program meets at the Nature Center and incorporates daily outdoor playtime and uses materials from nature to illustrate some of the lessons learned in the

curriculum. Other programs at the Nature Center include Nature Discovery Days for families, lectures and nature walks for adults, nature-themed summer camps and special events.

Beyond the Nature Center, the park district provides other opportunities for participants to enjoy the outdoors, for example, through outdoor fitness classes, gardening at the Ron Ory Community Garden Plots, fishing programs and watercraft rentals, to name a few.

One of the memorable emails we received from a resident conveyed the following thoughts about a natural area in a park named Hobson West Ponds: "There are paths around the ponds and through the fields which enable me to joyfully walk there most days with my dog. (There I can see) the heron who lives there, the goldfinches eating the berries, the monarchs on the milkweed, the various types of asters helping to feed the late pollinators, the tree where the hawk hangs out, the place where I once saw an owl, where I watched a turtle lay its eggs, and where I enjoy many more species I don't even know the names of. I adore this area – it is one of the few places where I can feel truly lost in nature. There is always something new to see and learn about."



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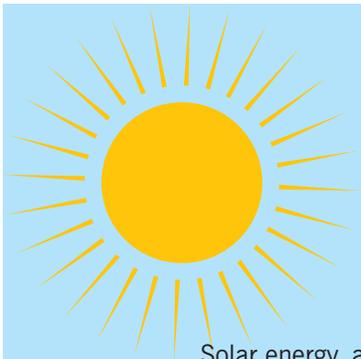
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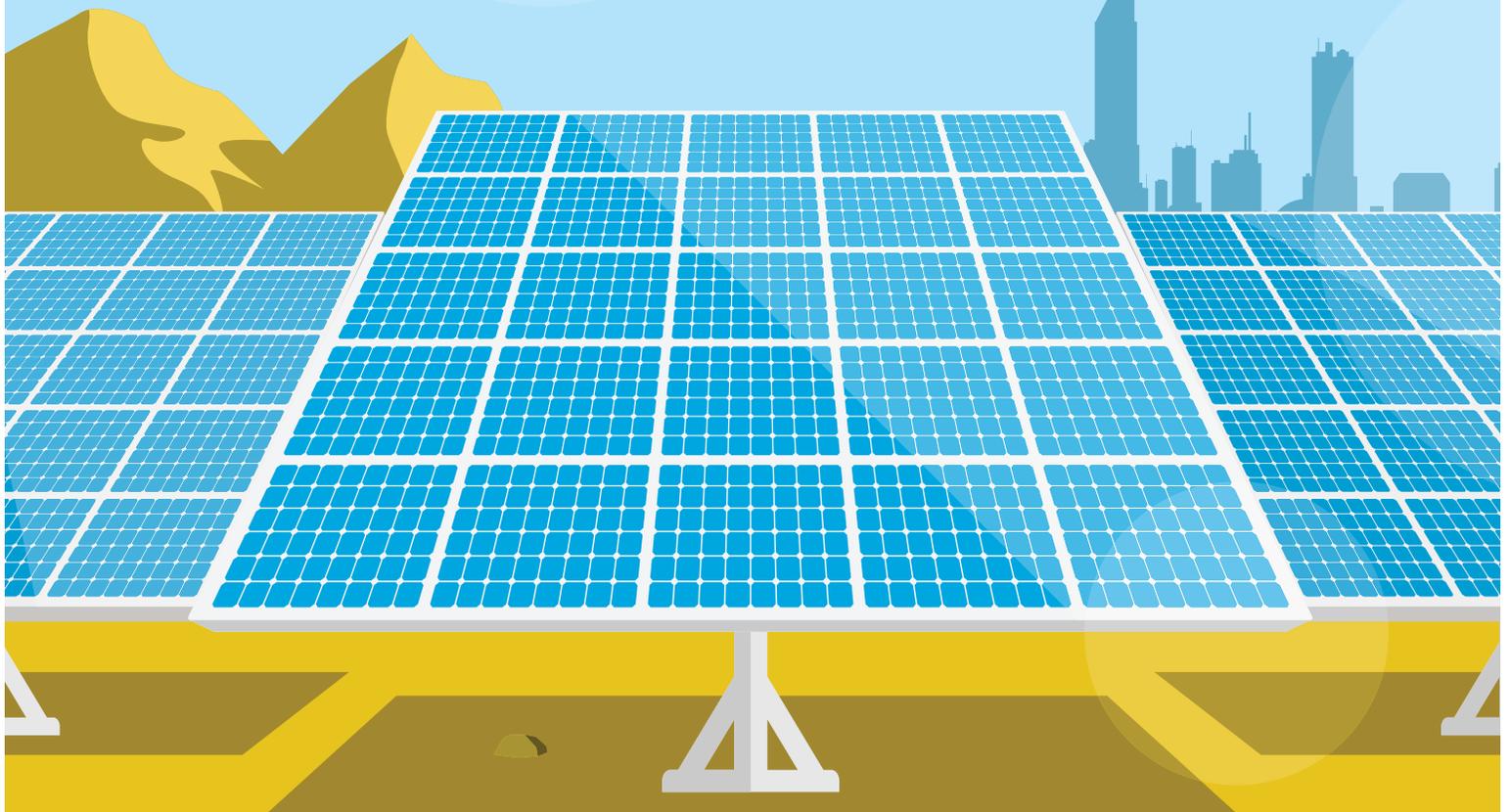
Map designs that give a clear picture of trails and resources



Solar energy, also referred to as solar photovoltaics (PV) is the simple process of collecting light rays from the sun and converting that into usable electricity for your facilities. Sunlight is the most abundant natural resource here on Earth. This technology certainly is not new and the first solar panel was made in 1883 by Charles Fritts. What has rapidly changed over the last decade is the efficiency of the panels which leads to increased power output per solar panel, so essentially you are installing more solar power for the same amount of labor. In fact, the cost per watt of solar installed has dropped 70% in the last decade. This increased output allows you to get more electricity in smaller spaces than you could before and helps you further reduce your carbon footprint.

Solar Energy is Your Friend

By Chris Lindgren, Superintendent of Parks & Planning, Park District of Oak Park





I talk about solar a lot – both professionally and personally - and in my many conversations, the same hesitations always come up: **worry of roof leaks, ongoing maintenance concerns, high costs** and a kind of an odd fear of just taking the leap to install their first system. By contrast, I cannot think of a time where I was talking about solar with someone that had installed it who had regretted the decision or would not do it again. For this article, I wanted to focus on some of the challenges that people and organizations face when looking at solar options, and hopefully simplify things to keep us moving in the right direction.

Let's talk about the installation challenges and things to think about when considering solar. Since you are most often installing solar on your roof there are two main barriers to overcome. First, is the age of your roof - of course, it makes sense to have a relatively new roof or one in good condition because you don't want to have to remove the solar array to replace your roof. The second, and possibly more significant barrier, is the increased weight load that your roof needs to be able to hold. You can hire a structural engineer to help you determine if you have capacity at a relatively small cost or pass this on to the solar contractor. Taking the time to inspect your roof before installation will save you in possible future costs and headaches. Certified solar contractors do a great job in ensuring your system is installed correctly so that your roof will not leak. Another benefit once installed is that it is another layer of protection for your roof underneath resulting in longer life. Ground mounted systems are similar to flat roof installs since the panels can easily be positioned to get the maximum amount of sunlight each day. This is a great option if you have the land to support them.

Our agency has had solar panels for close to a decade with little or no maintenance issues. The panels are incredibly durable to all types of weather and even curious little ones throwing small rocks, except for long foul balls from the high school baseball team (definitely speaking from experience). The main issues with solar would be keeping

them clean and free from hungry squirrels that like to chew on wires. In our Chicagoland area, we get plenty of hard rains throughout the year that make cleaning a non-issue, but if you are close to open land in dry climates they may need to be rinsed off once or twice a year. As an individual in charge of maintenance on many facilities, I sure wish other building components were as low maintenance as all of our solar panels.

The upfront cost of solar tends to be one of the biggest barriers for many agencies and there are now some great options available if you do not have the capital funds to purchase the system outright. Purchasing the system outright is the best option, as the payback tends to be less than 10 years depending on the incentives available in your area. A 10-year payback on something that is reducing (or eliminating) your energy costs surely is a sound financial decision.

Another option to manage the cost of adding solar would be through “community solar” which essentially means that you are buying the clean energy from a solar system that is installed in your service area. This is a contract you will sign with a community solar vendor and typically it is for a reduced energy rate which will save your agency money on the monthly electricity costs. Other opportunities include purchasing solar REC's (Renewable Energy Credits), solar lease or a power purchase agreement. These options come at no upfront cost and you are simply paying a monthly energy rate similar to your typical energy bill. There are grant opportunities around solar energy installations, state incentives and the new Federal Inflation Reduction Act signed into law has tons of environmental incentives. One of which is a 30% direct payment for taxing bodies coming in 2023.

Utility costs are always rising and hitting our budgets hard every year. Installing solar will help you limit your exposure to these rising costs and once the system is paid off you are looking at free power from the sun for many years to come. Don't be afraid to take the leap!



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Bloomingdale Park District

Relocating, Reconstructing and Redesigning an Entire Recreation Center Tele-Network

Bloomingdale Park District project encompassed several years, requiring new construction, new infrastructure, and temporary space in a shopping mall.

The Bloomingdale Park District board won approval for a much-needed redesign of their main facility, Johnston Recreation Center (JRC).

At the beginning of the project, they faced a monumental technology challenge – determining where all staff and their services were going to operate during the construction phase. Their entire tele-network (phones, voice service and internet) had to move and operate under interesting circumstances.

Bloomingdale partnered with RAM Communications to relocate the network and keep it functioning in completely different environments. Due to space restrictions, Bloomingdale staff were relocated from the JRC building to several facilities, including a local shopping mall. This change required a new, reprogrammed phone system that had to be reprogrammed to function in a distributed network environment. The temporary system had to function in four different facilities as if everyone were in the same building.

The design included an SDWAN (Software Defined Wide Area Network) service which was critical in keeping the distributed network alive and functioning during peak usage.

The next big challenge was bringing new services to the renovated JRC building. The facility was in need of faster speeds and more efficient network capacity. To accomplish this, RAM researched and presented numerous options, and helped Bloomingdale settle on a new fiber infrastructure.

“We organized and managed several site surveys with our communication partners,” said RAM President Rob McCoy. “The surveys helped determine the best physical locations for services at the lowest possible construction costs.”



The fiber project took just over three months to complete, and when ready, the tele-network was relocated back to the main JRC building. The new network was connected to the updated computer systems and tested. Then, over a matter of just two days, all phone systems were relocated, reprogrammed, and ready for use.

The new tele-network included several improvements over the old system. Internet capacity doubled allowing end users to work more efficiently. Voice and internet redundancy were both addressed in the new design. The Park District now has an SDWAN router in place that manages redundant internet services.

In addition to new technologies, RAM was able to help Bloomingdale phase out old ones. Faxes were still necessary for the maintenance and JRC operations. However, RAM was able to replace outdated (and expensive) analog phone lines with IP fax modems. This solution saves money and eliminates another invoice for the accounting team.

RAM dedicated considerable time working with Bloomingdale to construct a new, better tele-network. Careful planning, communication, and site visits kept the transitional interruptions to a minimum so the Bloomingdale staff was able return to work smoothly.

Project in Brief

Challenge:

Maintain a temporary tele-network with staff in multiple facilities while installing a new, faster fiber system in the main JRC building.

Solution:

RAM Communications designed and installed a new fiber infrastructure to meet current and future telecommunication needs.

Outcomes:

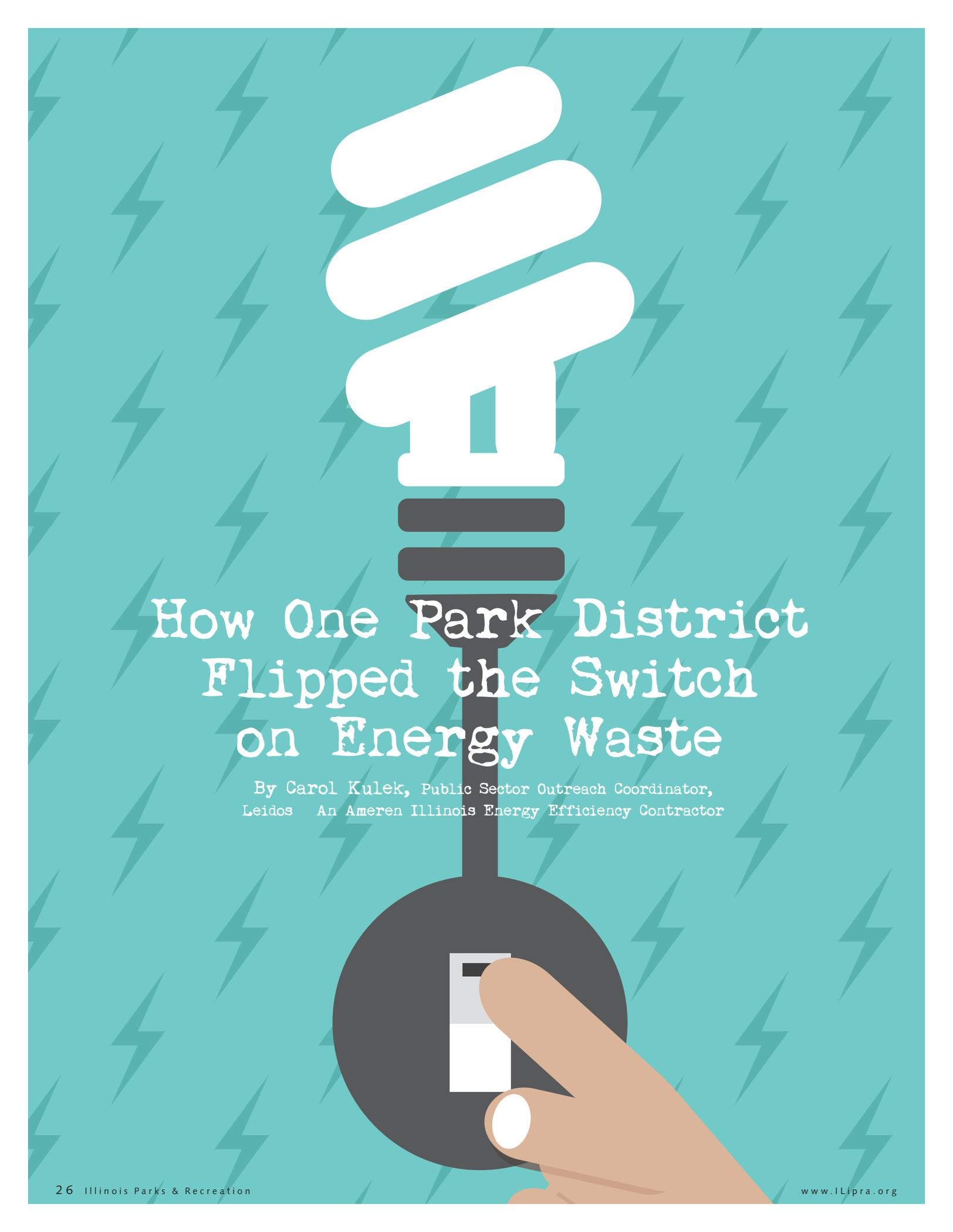
Preserved PBX investment and kept it functioning during all build-phases saving Bloomingdale thousands of dollars in capital costs. Improved internet performance and eliminated redundancy without increasing budget.

“The transition out of our old building into temporary space, and then back into a renovated building was seamless,” said Josh Hendricks, Bloomingdale Park District Director of Marketing & Communications. “RAM Communications never missed a beat. We moved back into a renovated building with upgraded technology with hardly any cost increase.” - Josh Hendricks, Bloomingdale Park District

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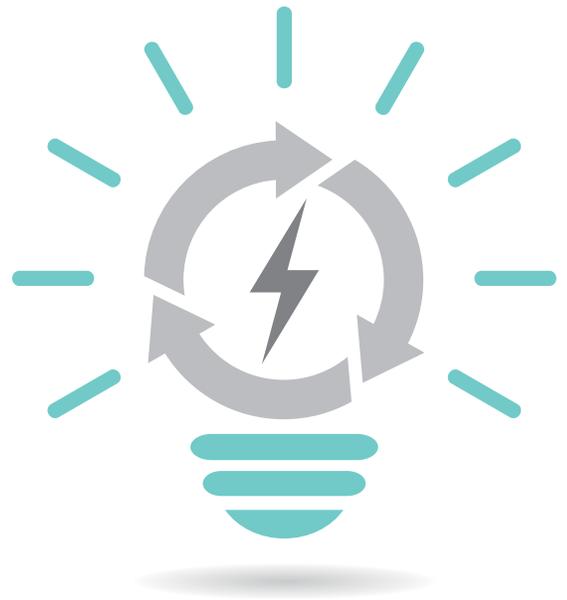




How One Park District Flipped the Switch on Energy Waste

By Carol Kulek, Public Sector Outreach Coordinator,
Leidos An Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Contractor

As caretakers of more than 700 acres of parks, playgrounds and trails, the Champaign Park District is keen to reduce its carbon footprint while preserving and enhancing park assets for patrons. Featuring six indoor tennis courts, Dodds Tennis Center has been a popular venue for friendly competition for decades. New lighting at Dodds Tennis Center was part of the park district's capital improvement plan for years, but it competed with other projects that proved more pressing. After the director of operations learned about the incentives offered through the Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program, an energy savings plan was put in place.



The energy savings plan for Dodds included the removal and recycling of metal halide bulbs, fixtures and ballasts. The plan also included the installation of new LED fixtures using the same support bracket system and wiring. The outdated metal halide lighting required up to 20 minutes to warm up and extensive staff hours spent on maintenance of ballasts and lightbulbs, along with increased energy cost. In some areas of the Dodds Center, illumination levels were not meeting recommended standards for proper sporting play.

The Champaign Park District put out a request for bids and ultimately awarded the job to a registered Ameren Illinois Program Ally contractor. The project was completed in just under two weeks when the facility was closed for the summer session.

Dan Olson, director of operations for the Champaign Park District, said the experience was one that he would recommend to any agency looking to make the switch. The district will see benefits when it comes to long-term operational cost savings and that every dollar saved can go back into other important capital projects. He added that of all the park district's sustainability efforts, the lighting component is the most impactful. Additionally, the incentive dollars allowed the district to get approval for a Phase 2 project to upgrade the rest of the facility to LEDs, from the lobby to the locker rooms, which wouldn't have been possible without the incentive.

The energy efficiency program standards were enacted in 2008 and required Ameren Illinois to collect a fee from all Ameren Illinois electric and natural gas customers from their monthly utility bills. The Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program provides incentives to help businesses, nonprofits and public organizations reduce their annual energy costs.

Interested in exploring energy savings plans? Visit the Ameren Illinois Energy Efficiency Program website at AmerenIllinoisSavings.com. On the website, customers can learn about ways to save on energy costs, including energy efficiency incentives available, and they can locate an Ameren Illinois Energy Advisor or a registered Ameren Illinois Program Ally contractor to ensure proper guidance.

Benefits to the Champaign Park District

- More than \$33,000 in incentives were received for upgrade projects.
- Annual dollar savings of more than \$32,000.
- Better quality of light.
- Five-year guarantee on new LED lighting.
- Improved staff and patron satisfaction.
- Reduced maintenance and disposal costs.
- Reduced impact on the environment.



Partnerships matter.

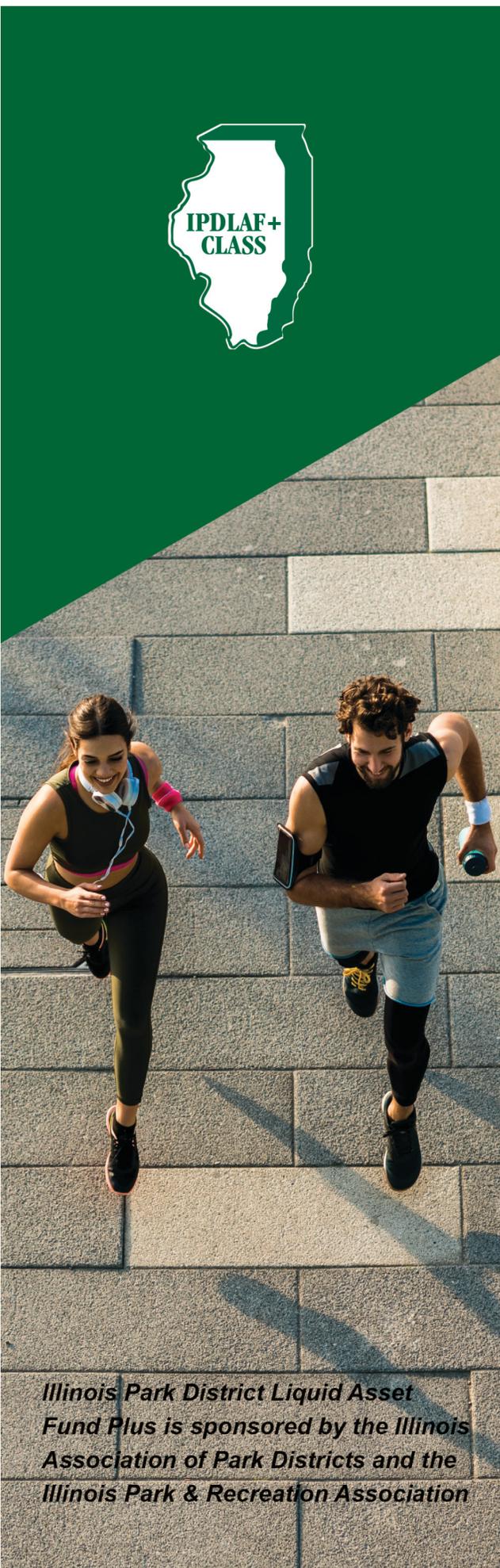
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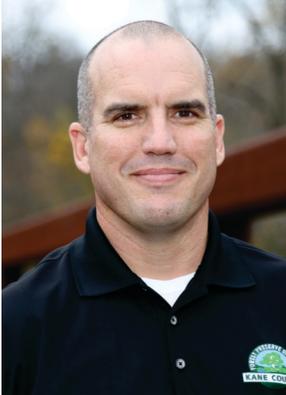
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Illinois Park District Liquid Asset Fund Plus is sponsored by the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park & Recreation Association



PEOPLE & PLACES



Benjamin Haberthur named next Forest Preserve District of Kane County Executive Director

Benjamin Haberthur has been named as new executive director of the Forest Preserve District of Kane County,

Haberthur is currently the district's director of natural resource management. He will formally assume executive director duties, Dec. 1.

The Forest Preserve District of Kane County began an executive search in September, after current Executive Director Monica Meyers announced she would retire at the end of 2022, following 18 years of service at the forest preserve district.

Haberthur brings more than 19 years of conservation experience to his new role, 11 of those with the Forest Preserve District of Kane County. He has served as the director of natural resource management since March 2016, and prior to that, was the district's restoration ecologist. Haberthur previously worked as natural resources manager for Campton Township Open Space, and was formerly a GIS specialist and restoration technician with the McHenry County Conservation District. Haberthur holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Earth Systems Science & Policy from California State University-Monterey Bay. He also served in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves.



In Memoriam

Illinois Parks and Recreation magazine offers its condolences to the family and friends of Schaumburg Park District Commissioner **Mike Daniels**, who passed away on Nov. 22, 2022.

Daniels moved to Schaumburg in 1973 and was elected to the Schaumburg Park District

Board of Park Commissioners in 1995.

Commissioner Daniels played a key role in many of the district's major projects during his tenure including: The Sport Center, K-9 Dog Park, Ken Alley Safety Park, Atcher Island Water Park, Bison's Bluff Nature Playground, Olympic Park, Schaumburg Golf Club renovation and more.

He was also instrumental in the district obtaining the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Gold Medal Award for excellence in parks and recreation as well as NRPA elite CAPRA accreditation status. He also helped the district achieve numerous Distinguished Accreditation awards from the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association.

Daniels was an avid golfer and Schaumburg Park District recently honored him by dedicating a lake to him at Schaumburg Golf Club.



Monica A. Meyers retires after 18 years leading the Forest Preserve District of Kane County

After 18 years at the helm of the Forest Preserve District of Kane County as executive director, **Monica A. Meyers** has retired from the district.

Meyers' various accomplishments include: oversight of four successful land acquisition and preserve improvement referenda, investments that more than tripled the district's land holdings to 23,173 acres, skillful application for grant funding that afforded the district millions in additional dollars to make conservation, education and recreation dollars stretch further, construction of professional work facilities for all district departments, earning Illinois Distinguished Agency Accreditation status — the first forest preserve district in Illinois to achieve such recognition, and, managing countless projects including preserve openings, trail expansions, creation of Big Rock Campground, Creek Bend Nature Center, and a recent multi-million redesign of Settler's Hill Golf Course.

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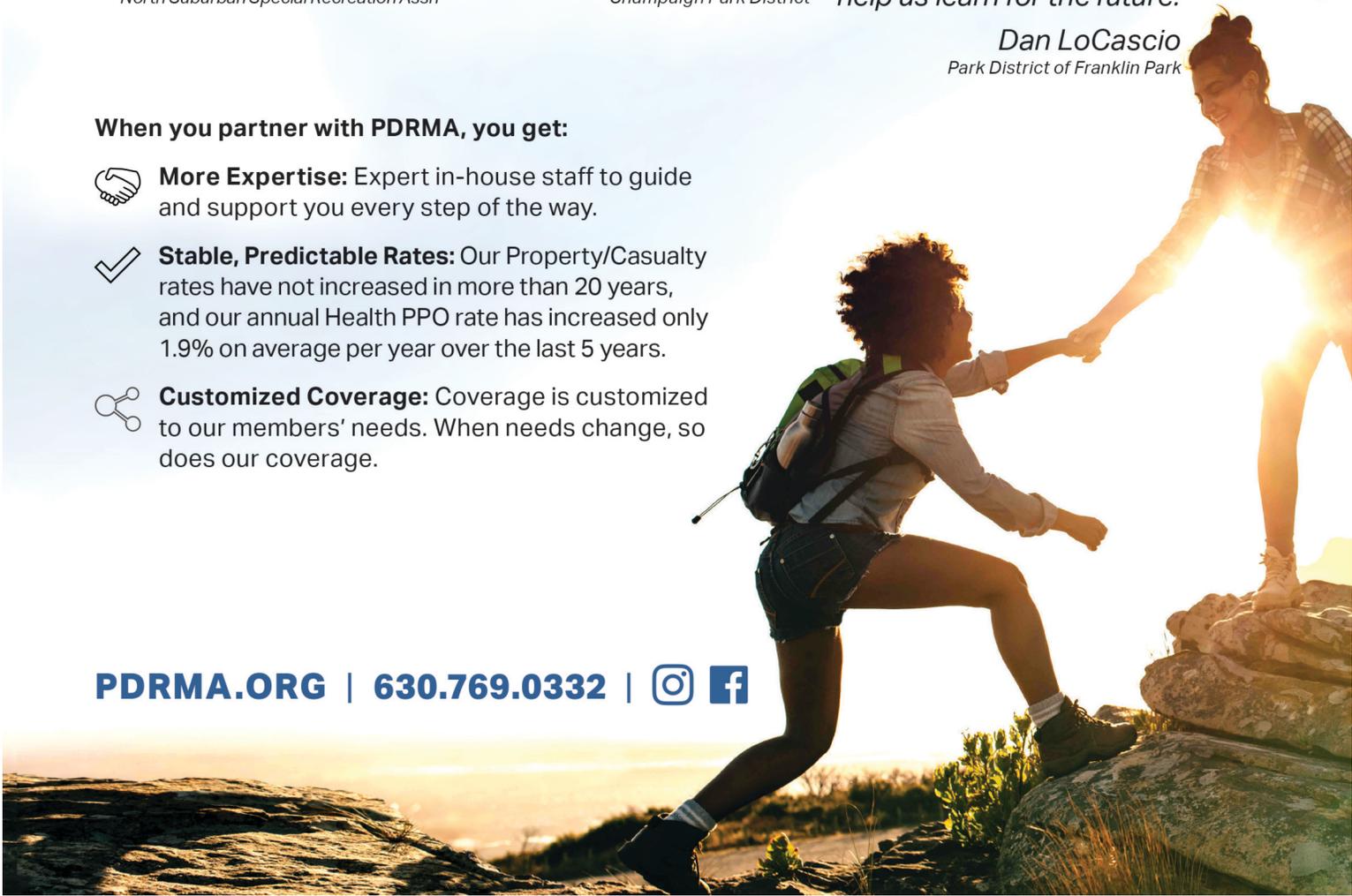
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