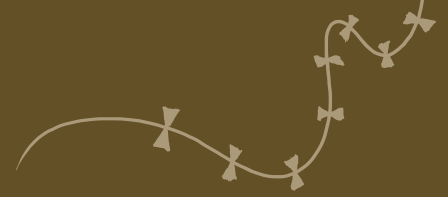


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Volume 52, Number 1 | January/February 2021



PARKS AND RECREATION

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



a historical look at iconic parks & facilities

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FROM THE EDITOR

Making History

This issue of *Illinois Parks and Recreation* magazine is looking back through time at the incredible and long-standing historical locations housed in our park districts, forest preserves, conservation, recreation and special recreation agencies.



Recognizing and honoring history is an important part of many of our agencies. Whether it be events, buildings, sites, or historical figures, visitors from near and far often gravitate to places of great significance and I'm delighted we can share some of those stories today.

Understanding history helps us make better plans for the future and now, more than ever, is the perfect time to take a look back to see how greatness grew from a small seed of an idea.

On page 26, the Peoria Park District details the genesis of how it came to be in *Laura Bradley Park – The Birth of the Peoria Park District*. In *The History of the Chicago Fieldhouse* on page 20, the Chicago Park District explores how the fieldhouse became an integral part of the community. Finally, in *Creating an Icon* on page 14, the Pekin Park District looks back at its roots to see how a park district grew from a failed local business.

These are just a small sliver of the many stories our park districts have to share, check out the digital version of this issue for more stories from our agencies throughout the state.

— Wayne Utterback, Editor



211 East Monroe Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701-1186 217.523.4554 FAX 217.523.4273 iapd@ilparks.org www.ilparks.org www.Ilipra.org

Managing Editor
PETER M. MURPHY, President and Chief Executive Officer, IAPD

Editor
WAYNE UTTERBACK

Graphic Design
GOSS ADVERTISING, 217.423.4739, www.gossadvertising.com

Advertising Sales Representative
TODD PERNSTEINER, 952.841.1111, info@pernstainer.com

JOINT EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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IPRA HEADQUARTERS

536 East Avenue, LaGrange, IL 60525-6815 708.588.2280 Fax 708.354.0535 www.Ilipra.org

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PARK & RECREATION ASSOCIATION



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

Pivoting During the Pandemic

When the coronavirus landed in Illinois on January 24, it triggered a distressing chain of events that turned the park, recreation, and conservation world upside down. A statewide stay-at-home order lasting more than two months combined with directives to pause programs and services, limit gatherings, and temporarily close facilities could have paralyzed our park and recreation family, but it did not.

IAPD member agencies adapted with lightning speed to adjust their programs and services in this time of need. Virtual exercise classes, simulated tours of zoos and museums, scavenger hunts, online cooking and art classes, drive-by special events, and more kept children, adults, and seniors active, healthy, connected, and engaged. Park districts and forest preserves served as distribution points for meals and personal protective equipment. And, when working parents needed remote learning locations for their children, park agencies responded by providing safe, socially-distanced learning pods.

The Illinois Association of Park Districts also took immediate action and pivoted to assist our members in navigating these uncharted waters. We immediately created a COVID-19 Resources webpage with accurate, reliable information including grant opportunities, operational guidelines, Executive Orders, and more. Our *Leadership Institute* was revamped with content-rich, complimentary webinars; and we facilitated Zoom roundtables, which enabled our members to connect and share strategies and new practices.

We amplified our legislative advocacy program and prevented a proposed sweep of OSLAD funds and worked to secure a \$29 million appropriation for new OSLAD grants and transformed our annual *Parks Day at the Capitol* into an incredible virtual event, featuring an inspiring video that was sent to legislators showcasing *The Power of Parks in a Pandemic*.

A milestone also occurred in 2020 when the Great American Outdoors Act was signed into law by President Trump on August 4. This landmark legislation will provide full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which provides funding for the national park system and grants to park districts, forest preserves, and

conservation districts for public park and open space acquisition. This historic achievement was a hard fought battle that IAPD and our member agencies championed for many years.

In 2020, we also pivoted by producing weekly webinars designed to elevate our industry's response to these new times, and more than 5,100 members participated in our twenty-one complimentary webinars.

Pivoting is not an end to the disruption process. It is the beginning of the next leg of our collective journey.

Our strategies may have changed, but our vision will not. Together, with our dedicated membership of elected board members and park and recreation professionals, we will continue to overcome obstacles and provide cutting edge services to support the best parks, recreational opportunities, and open spaces in the nation.

Just a sampling of IAPD's activity in 2020 also includes:

- Distribution of 57 *Legislative Updates* and *Legal News* to keep members up to date on news from the State Capitol, U.S. Congress, grant information, and developments related to COVID-19.
- Creation of the *Statewide Compilation of Tax Levy and Employment Data for All Illinois Park Districts Report*, which allows member agencies to compare their tax extension, employee headcount, total payroll, and other information to agencies with a similar population, EAV, tax extension, tax cap status and more.

This valuable membership tool is part of an IAPD database update with 50 new categories of the most recent employment, financial, tax levy, and other information from the Department of Revenue and Comptroller for each member agency.

- Launching our next wave of research to collect key metrics from member agencies that identify the scope of their services, facilities, open space, and investment/spending among other important items. Jeff

Andreason, President of aQity Research, conducted a complimentary IAPD member webinar, ***Using Research to Benchmark and Plan During COVID-19 and Beyond***, to outline preliminary findings.

This valuable research will provide member agencies with sufficient data to draw benchmark comparisons statewide, as well as with selected agencies of similar size and location.

- Publishing the *IAPD Election Calendar*, which contains important dates and other information related to the April Consolidated Election. The publication was made available in both hard copy and digital format.
- Reviewing each of the **3,709 bills** that were introduced this calendar year, bringing the total number of bills reviewed in the 101st General Assembly to **9,844**. We also reviewed the **400 amendments** and are tracking **937 bills** for their impact on member agencies.
- Immediately responding, during the General Assembly's four-day special session, to an amendment filed late at night to the budget implementation bill that would have swept the OSLAD fund for the 2021 fiscal year. IAPD sprung to action by calling legislative leaders, presenting testimony the following morning before a House committee and sending a legislative alert to the membership. Our immediate action avoided the proposed sweep and secured a **\$29 million appropriation** for new OSLAD grants.
- Recreating the 14th annual Best of the Best Awards Gala into an amazing virtual event featuring a pre-recorded show with inspiring photos and video footage of our winners. Member agencies hosted watch parties that enabled them to celebrate while adhering to safe social distancing practices.
 - A new award category, *The Power of Parks Award*, was also created to recognize agencies that displayed innovative and insightful ways to pivot their programs, events, and services to best meet the needs of their residents in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- IAPD's podcast, *Park Cast*, which continued to shine a spotlight on the work that IAPD is doing in partnership with our members to advance parks, recreation, and conservation. Fourteen *Park Cast* episodes on IAPD's website have experienced 1,783 listens.

Money-Saving Programs & Grants

IAPD places a high priority on developing money-saving programs, researching grants, and discovering other incentive plans that help our members thrive in a challenging economy.

IAPD member agencies have a 92% participation rate in our outstanding cost saving programs!

The Illinois Association of Park Districts also provides exclusive programs designed to maximize our members' resources and advance their mission, goals, and objectives.

- IAPD's *Board Development and Self-Evaluation Program* provided boards with specialized assistance in defining roles and responsibilities, describing duties for oversight and governance, and determining leadership within their agencies. Seventy-eight board self-evaluations have been completed to date.
- Forty-six commissioners have reached the highest level in IAPD's *Board Member Development Program* – Master Board Member. The program inspires board members to track accomplishments made during terms on their local board and rewards them with statewide recognition.
- Our highly-acclaimed *Director Search* program remained popular among agencies seeking to hire an executive. IAPD has placed 134 executive directors/CEOs to date.
- IAPD's Legends Video Series grew into 24 videos featuring past and present commissioners offering advice for new commissioners and sharing their thoughts on the ever-changing world of parks and recreation.
- The 8th edition of the *Illinois Park District Financial Procedures Guide* was published, featuring a comprehensive compilation of the laws and rules pertaining to a park district's annual financial processes and procedures. The publication complements IAPD's vast library of resources, including *The Park District Code*, designed to provide valuable knowledge to assist them in their roles.
- Responded to **739 legal** inquiries from nearly 200 different IAPD member agencies – **a 73% increase over 2019 and more than twice the average annual number of inquiries**.

Please read the IAPD Annual Report in its entirety to see the full force of your association's actions on behalf of its members. This past year has been different than all others but our commitment to excellence has never wavered.

On behalf of the IAPD Board of Trustees and staff, we wish you and all of our members and their families a wonderful new year filled with love, hope, renewal and a return to normalcy.

Thank you for all the blessings you have provided your communities this past year. You are truly the fabric that binds communities together and makes for a life rich with opportunities.

EYE ON THE PROFESSION

A CLOSER LOOK AT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN THE PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSION



By Debbie Trueblood, CAE
IPRA Executive Director

Hope to 'See' You at Conference

On behalf of the IPRA Board of Directors and staff team, we are eagerly looking forward to seeing so many of you at this year's first ever VIRTUAL Soaring to New Heights Conference! For many of our members, the conference is the highlight of the year and the top-rated member benefit. It is the culmination of so many volunteers coming together as one community, bound together in our passion for parks and recreation. I can't wait!

My thanks to the volunteers on the Joint Conference Committee. This committee, which includes professionals from IPRA's membership and commissioners from IAPD's membership, are a passionate group of volunteers who work tirelessly on the conference planning every detail to ensure the best conference experience. My thanks to IPRA Chair Andrew Dallner and IAPD Chair Lori Palmer and the committee: IPRA Program Chair Carlo Capalbo, IAPD Program Chair Adriane Johnson, IPRA Events Chair Tim Reinbold, IAPD Events Chair Ted Schulz, IPRA Operations Chair Lacy Velasquez, IAPD Operations Chair Jerri-Lynn Kleina, IPRA Operations Co-Chair Dawn Krawiec, IAPD Operations Chair Jeff Rigoni, IPRA Exhibits Chair John Wilson, IAPD Exhibits Chair Bob Schmidt, IPRA Exhibits Co-Chair John Curran, IAPD Exhibits Co-Chair Robert Johnson, Sr., along with Conference Directors Leesa Johnson from IPRA and Sue Triphahn from IAPD.

My thanks to the dedicated IPRA Program Committee. This committee works to ensure that you have the best educational experience at conference. My thanks to IPRA Program Chair Carlo Capalbo and IAPD Program Chair Adriane Johnson and the committee: Manny Aguilar, Jonelle Bailey, Laura Cavazos, Erin Chapa, John Chase, Liz Cox, Caitlin Deptula, Mark Dolphin, Mat Emken, Theresa Esposito, Nikki Ginger, Lonette Hall, Kim Hansen, Carol Heafey, Kolbe Kasper, Jennifer Knitter, Maureen McCarthy, Ken McEwen, Mike McNicholas, Rachel Pavesich, Gina Petkus, Marlon Rodas, Karyn Roth, John Short, Rob Sperl,

and Ethan Williams, along with Conference Directors Leesa Johnson from IPRA and Sue Triphahn from IAPD, and Kim Laper, IPRA's Education and Events Manager.

Conference will be January 28-30, 2021 virtually, starting Thursday morning, as there will not be pre-cons. This year, you will have access to the virtual conference portal for 30 days after conference and registered attendees can watch the session recordings and get CEUs, potentially earning many more CEUs than you would be able to in a normal year.

This year, conference will open on Thursday morning with the IPRA Annual Business Meeting. All are welcome to attend this event where we will present a variety of awards for both agencies and individuals, and all new board and section board members will be inaugurated.

Many thanks to
IPRA's dedicated
volunteers!



The usual awards luncheon will be split up into two events. IPRA's Awards ceremony will be held at 3:00-3:45 on Thursday. We will be announcing our top awards at that time, including our brand new "Champions for Change" award for an agency who is taking active steps towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I also encourage you to attend the IPRA Fireside Chat on Friday morning at 10:00 with NRPA's President and CEO Kristine Stratton and the NRPA Board Chair Michael Kelly, who is also Chicago Park District's General Superintendent

and CEO. I will be chatting with them about national trends in the park and recreation community.

Do not miss the Keynote General Session on Friday, January 29 at 4:00 pm. The speaker this year will be Jason Benetti, a TV play-by-play announcer for ESPN and the Chicago White Sox. Mr. Benetti is a local from Illinois and he is a spokesperson for the Cerebral Palsy Foundation. He has degrees in broadcast journalism, economics and psychology and he earned his Juris Doctor at Wake Forest School of Law in 2011. I have heard him speak before and he is memorable, funny, and inspiring. You will not want to miss this great session!

We also have some other exciting events planned. During the week of conference, the Illinois Park and Recreation Foundation (IPRF) will be hosting their silent auction virtually. Connect to their new Facebook page to make sure you see all the announcements and the items to bid on.

I also want to thank the 2020 IPRA Board for all their time and commitment to IPRA this year: Chair Erin Folk, Past Chair Jeff Fougerousse, Chair Elect Doug Damery, Secretary/At Large Rep Trisha Breitlow, Membership Council Rep Erika Strojinc, Chicago Metro Region Rep Margaret Resnick, Chicago Metro Region Rep Lisa Sheppard, Northwest Region Rep Andy Thurman, Central Region Rep Derek Harms, and Southern Region Rep Andrew Dallner.

Finally, I want to thank the members of the IPRA staff team. They work tirelessly all year to ensure the conference is a success for you and that you get the experience you're hoping for. My thanks to Finance Director Barry Franks, Conference & Meetings Director Leesa Johnson, CMP, Marketing Manager & Executive Assistant Jean Kane, Education & Events Manager Kim Laper, CPRP, Membership & Website Manager Lynn Rotunno, Education Director Duane Smith, CPRP, and Communications and Marketing Director Heather Weishaar.

IPRA is thriving today because of the continued dedication and commitment of our volunteers. Again, my thanks and congratulations to the Joint Conference Committee and Program Committee on a successful conference. All your work is going to culminate in a successful and memorable conference that we will all remember. I look forward to "seeing" you online at conference.

Upcoming Events

Series B: Tuesdays, March 9-30, 2021

The ELITE Young Professional Virtual Workshop

Led by Ohio University's Annie Frisoli of Creating Community, LLC provides an opportunity to examine communication strategies to assist young professionals in making greater impacts in meetings, conversations, and presentations to ultimately have positive impacts on their team,

March 2021

Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Spring CPSI classroom course will continue to be provided as a virtual training. This Online Blended Course is comprised of two steps, the completion of the CPSI Online Prep Course followed by a Live Virtual Training led by a CPSI Instructor.

March 10 or 18, 2021

Marketing and Branding Lessons from the Pandemic

Presented by Aamir Munshi of

The Learning Scape, he will spend time discussing best practices and marketing-strategies he's learned during the pandemic from brands around the world.

April 14 or 15, 2021

Equity and Inclusion: Beyond the Talk and Into Action

Presented by Tracey Crawford of Illinois NWSRA, she will facilitate a discussion about equity, inclusion, and system racism, and how agencies can be leaders and agents of change for their community.

May 12 or 20, 2021

Shifts in Parks and Recreation

Presented by Theresa Penbrooke of GreenPlay LLC, she is going to discuss the types of essential services communities have come to expect from their park district (food, shelter, education, wellness, and more) and how you and your team can plan to meet those needs and elevate your community impact.

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- Breaking Barriers: The History and Future of the Glass Ceiling
- Top Trends in Parks and Recreation for 2022

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Jason Anselment
General Counsel

Park Districts Offer People Hope

The Legislative Breakfast program has played an important role in IAPD's advocacy efforts for many years. These local events provide an opportunity for commissioners and professionals to engage with their legislators and hear the latest from the Statehouse while discussing the IAPD Legislative Platform and other important issues like capital funding needs and the negative impact of newly proposed unfunded mandates.

In recent years, these events have been extremely well timed as they have coincided with urgent advocacy efforts to save dedicated OSLAD funding from special fund sweeps, make the case for funding in a long range capital bill, demonstrate the specific impact of proposed property tax freeze legislation, and much more.

In addition to meeting with hundreds of IAPD members, one of my favorite parts of these events is seeing legislators interact with their constituents back in their legislative districts away from the hustle and bustle of the Capitol. The friendly settings at local park and recreation facilities provide the perfect venues for legislators to concentrate on parks, recreation, and conservation, which they clearly enjoy. It is always reassuring to hear just how much members of the General Assembly recognize and appreciate all that park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, recreation, and special recreation agencies do to support their communities.

Each year during the breakfast program, we also hear inspiring stories from legislators about the personal impact that park districts and forest preserves have had on their own lives, e.g., how their first job was at a park district, how specific programs impacted their children or grandchildren, or their personal experience in utilizing convenient and affordable programs and facilities to improve their physical and mental health. Several years ago, one legislator shared a personal story about the host park district and then made a profound statement that I will never forget when she declared that "park districts offer people hope."

We frequently cite the combined benefits that park and recreation agencies provide communities throughout Illinois such as senior services, special needs programming, fighting childhood obesity, reducing juvenile crime, promoting mental and physical health, and many others. And rightly so because, collectively, these essential services have a major impact.

However, we should never discount the positive influence these services can have on each individual like a senior experiencing loneliness, a child with special needs who is seeking opportunities, an at-risk youth in need of safety and attention during critical hours when school is not in session, or an adult who struggles with weight. For these individuals, the programs and services offered by park and recreation agencies can be the difference between hope and despair.

Along with an increased demand for services, the pandemic has triggered a greater need for hope. Despite funding, staffing, and other significant challenges, park and recreation agencies have once again answered the call by relying on their ingenuity to deliver services – and hope – during each and every phase.

This was readily apparent during the Power of Parks Award presentation at the recent IAPD Awards Gala as I listened to the stories of the innovative ways in which agencies adapted to deliver essential services to keep their communities connected, healthy, and engaged throughout the pandemic. It was hope – not despair – on the faces that were captured in the photos submitted by award winning agencies, and here are just a few of their inspiring stories.

In March, almost immediately after the initial Stay-at-Home Order was issued, the Mokena Community Park District pivoted and created the Home but Not Alone initiative that included online resources such as virtual programs, events, and contests for youth, teens, seniors,

and families. Teens could participate in virtual courses and games while seniors could access links to store hours, virtual museum tours, brain games, and fitness classes. The family page was packed with virtual getaways and free exercise videos to keep citizens involved.

The Palatine Park District also took immediate action with a stay-at-home campaign that offered free activities, external resources, and ideas for safely visiting parks. The district provided residents access to free, live classes and healthy recipes. A three-part virtual race series inspired residents to increase their fitness while maintaining social distance resulting in the community logging more than 20,000 miles! Theater teachers utilized Zoom for rehearsals and the Palatine Children's Chorus hosted a virtual choir and virtual classes including sports skills training, theatre, martial arts, and music. *Activity Kits to Go* contained crafts to keep children engaged.

SRAs like the Special Recreation Association of Central Lake County immediately recognized the devastation that isolation could have on the special needs population because of the deprivation of opportunities to socialize, stay active, build relationships, and learn skills. So they quickly transitioned to virtual fitness, music, and social programs. In just four months, the small staff of eight produced 40 unique programs and reached over 100 different participants! The programs emphasized fine and gross motor skills, daily living activities, and peer interaction through Zoom while activity books, bus parades, and pen pal letters kept participants connected.

The Buffalo Grove Park District also delivered something positive for its community. Virtual sports kept athletes in shape, and the arts center offered virtual dance and acting classes. Seniors were able to socialize through virtual Bingo, and they learned valuable information through presentations on Medicare, home security, and identity scams. During the reopening phase, the district provided alternatives for the community to begin reengaging safely by hosting several special events including a drive-in movie that sold out in one day, a summer concert series, and movies under the stars. The district's Pod Squads provided remote learning space for children whose families needed assistance while schools were closed.

When COVID-19 forced a new way of living, the Mundelein Park & Recreation District offered free online exercise classes and a 5K run to keep residents physically fit, while Boredom Buster Contests and park district-themed word games kept them mentally alert. With typical celebrations discouraged, the district developed a porch party with a

balloon garland to honor special occasions. Programs were modified to be held virtually, and a dance recital was filmed to be shown as a movie in the park.

At the Bloomingdale Park District, the annual Touch-A-Truck event became See-A-Truck with garbage trucks, tractors, and emergency vehicles displayed for drive-by viewing. They held a Mother's Day drive-thru, drive-by preschool graduation, and car parade for graduating gymnasts. Residents remained engaged through virtual programming including cooking videos, fitness and craft classes, and social events. At-home participation soared in a food drive, scavenger hunt, and bike ride challenge. Summer camp became Camp Escape with small groups enjoying restructured activities. Camp on the Go - a weekly bag containing a craft, activity, recipe, and experiment - was a popular alternative to in-person camp.

As I imagine the hope that these programs provide to people of all ages during uncertain times when socialization, exercise, and childcare are urgently needed, I am amazed. But when I consider the fact that these are only a tiny fraction of all the opportunities park and recreation agencies have afforded residents on a statewide basis while confronting severe financial and staffing shortages, I am overwhelmed.

As we start a new year, our message of hope is still desperately needed. And that brings me back to the Legislative Breakfast program. As we face the challenges ahead, it is critical to remind legislators and our communities of the opportunities that local park and recreation agencies provide but also the tremendous financial constraints that have been wrought by the pandemic. The Legislative Breakfast program will provide a platform for these discussions.

This year, the Legislative Breakfast program will look a bit different as members of the Joint Legislative Committee are currently working with hosts to schedule virtual events. However, the virtual platform will still afford the same opportunity to share stories about the impact of parks, recreation, and conservation, hear from legislators, and discuss important legislative issues. Information on the dates and times of these events will be forthcoming soon, so please commit to attending your local event.

In the meantime, thank you for all that you do to provide people hope!



Photo Courtesy of:
Salt Creek Rural Park District



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C R E A T I N G A N



By Gary Gillis, Commissioner, Pekin Park District

Look up Pekin Park District on Trip Advisor and you'll find visitor reviews that show admiration for its history, evolution, and contemporary services. From the iconic 115-year old Mineral Springs Park Pavilion to hosting of the Pekin Marigold Festival and Winter Wonderland, the park district captures fun, play, and a strong sense of tradition for residents and visitors.



While the Pekin Park District traces its roots to 1902, it found its spark in the aftermath of a failed local business. But it was a citizen's grassroots effort to establish a new unit of government—a park district—that led to what we enjoy today.

In 1882, the Pekin Artesian Well Co. was formed in the hopes of extracting and then selling the supposed medicinal mineral water believed to be in the aquifer beneath it.

A 900-foot well yielded a smelly product that was sold in local bars and to residents who believed it was an elixir for “all that ails you.” Of course, the company shortly failed.

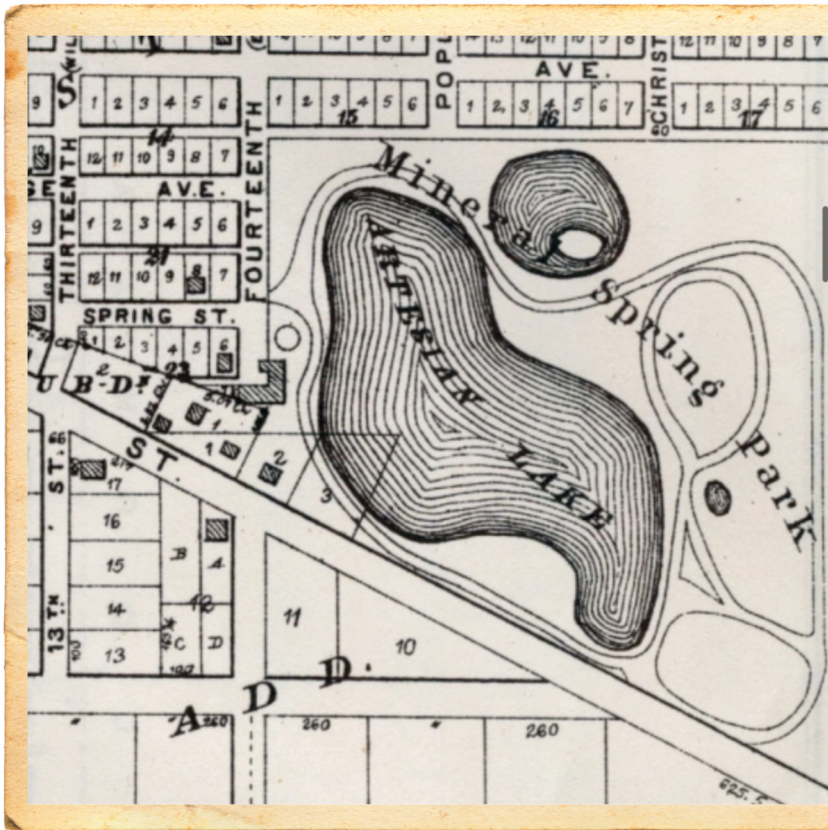
Out of a sense of altruism or possibly potential profit, an effort ensued to convert the area into a public park. A bathhouse and pagoda were built, followed by a small 12x20-foot public swimming pool. It was heated by steam, allowing nearly year-round usage. Two pools

eventually replaced it with one to be in use while the other was drained and then refilled. This was an early form of pool cleaning and filtration.

Located just west of what is now 14th Street in Pekin, these facilities faced two lakes that had been sculpted from an earlier cattle watering hole. One, Artesian Lake, was the larger of them, while a smaller circular lake lay just to its northeast. A floating bandshell was placed in one of the lakes and dirt roads were formed in an area referred to as Mineral Springs Park. A fountain was also added near the bathhouse.

Since the surrounding land had been barren pasture, various civic organizations and clubs donated 3,000 trees to be planted. Many survive to this day.

Perhaps by fate or providence, the park experienced a series of “disasters” that would sadly lead to its demise. In the late 1880s, the park was hit with what was referred to



as a “cyclone”. The bathhouse, pagoda, and bandstand on the lake were all destroyed. Money was needed to rebuild, but the private park financially faced unmet liabilities.

Concerned citizens got together and raised the funds needed to pay the bills. Shortly thereafter, an attempt was made to sell the park to the City of Pekin, the city rejected the offer.

Cash flow issues continued to plague operations. On March 11, 1887, the property was sold at a sheriff's auction for \$9,000 to settle claims.

Disaster befell the park again as a fire consumed the bathhouse. Another attempt was made to sell the grounds to the city with the approval to be made by voter referendum. That effort also failed and the park's future was in doubt.

More determined than ever, right-minded citizens gathered 100 signatures on a petition drive to establish a new unit of government rendering the park to community ownership rather than continued private ventures. The referendum passed and on December 14, 1902, the Pekin Park District was officially established.

The first action of the newly-formed park board would create an identity that symbolizes it to this day. They took up the question of procuring property. The main issue was whether they wanted to create a Central Park or procure parcels throughout the community for a series of neighborhood parks. After discussion, they voted to

establish a central main park and buy the 45-acre tract that had been home to the constantly struggling old Mineral Springs Park. An adjacent lot was also purchased. Subsequently, the decision was made to select a name for this combined land and the name “Mineral Springs Park” became permanent.

The second decision by the board would establish a timeless community icon. In August 1903, the board moved to begin drafting plans creating a Pavilion and adjoining “Palm House” to be built on the eastern shoreline of Artesian Lake. The old hand-written board minutes give no reason why they chose to build this specific type of facility. One can only speculate that it was following a trend that was developing elsewhere. For example, Lincoln Park and Garfield Park in the Chicago area were either constructing or updating their conservatories at the time. They served as gathering places, greenhouses, and botanical gardens.

At a cost of \$12,000, the Pekin Park Pavilion was commissioned to be built, initially without heat, electricity, or plumbing. At the meeting where the architectural plans were approved, the board also agreed to drain the existing park lakes with plans to replace them with what became Pekin's beautiful Mineral Springs Park Lagoon.

The Pavilion officially opened for public use and rentals on July 2, 1905. The rental of the facility could be had for \$5 with an added fee of \$1 for use of a piano. A kitchen also was placed in the basement. Today a small kitchen exists on the main level.

Originally lighted with gas lamps, electricity and heat were eventually added. Today, the facility is also air-conditioned and remains a popular local rental choice.

The Palm House was used as a greenhouse for park area plantings. It was also popular for its Christmas season displays enjoyed by the community. Sadly, over the decades, the structure fell into disrepair and upkeep was expensive. The decision was made to demolish this historic structure in the early 1970s.

Over the years, the Pavilion has seen many uses. Its large open area made it a popular gathering and meeting place. With ice skating on the Lagoon a popular winter activity, skaters often visited to enjoy concessions which included hot chocolate and hot Dr. Pepper with lemon.

A conservator lived in the facility. Canoes that were used on the Lagoon were stored for the winter beneath the wrap-around porch. For a time, the building was the home of the park superintendent of Grounds. In recent years, a small upstairs room has served as the office for the park police.

Over the ensuing decades, the grounds around the Pavilion changed. A sidewalk was added in the 1930s bordering the Lagoon and a large playground known as Kiddie Corral would become a popular local draw.

A renovation project for the Pavilion and Lagoon was undertaken in the early 1990s.

A large viewing area and deck, fishing piers, decorative lanterns, and two fountains to aerate the Lagoon were added. Recently a large pergola, replicating the Pavilion's

aesthetic profile, was placed adjacent to it. It is now a popular venue for weddings and other gatherings.

Today, a greatly expanded Pekin Park District is also home to eight neighborhood parks and 1599 acres of outer parks; numerous baseball, football, and soccer fields; a Skate Park; and a new large Sports Complex. There is a Senior Citizen's Center on the site of the original bathhouse, an Ice Arena, an outer park nature and program center, a full-service health club, and a fifth-generation pool—a family aquatic park. Golf enthusiasts will enjoy Lick Creek Golf Course, often ranked in the Top 100 Public Courses in the nation. Parkview Golf Course is another popular favorite.

The Pekin Park District has also partnered with the Fondulac Park District and operates the Illinois River Valley Special Recreation Association. In the last 15 years, the Pekin Park Foundation has been established, leveraging resources and financially assisting in meeting park wants and needs.

Today, the four outer parks are home to hiking trails, mountain biking, horseback riding, dog training, and even a remote-control airplane flying field. The land acquisition that has occurred over many years now makes the Pekin Park District one of the largest in Illinois.

In 2020, an Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Grant (OSLAD) was granted to the district. It will be used to renovate and upgrade an area that is mostly the old historic areas of Mineral Springs Park. In doing so, may we pause and remember our humble beginnings and those who had the wisdom to form this special district. It carries a rich tradition that we are very proud of, and one we intend to keep.



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THE HISTORY OF THE

Chicago Fieldhouse

By **Doreen O'Donnell**, Deputy Director of Planning and Development, Chicago Park District

For Chicago, the fieldhouse was and remains an important feature of the city. In the words of Chicago Park District General Superintendent and CEO Mike Kelly, “the fieldhouse is our calling card.” In the early 1900s, the concept of the fieldhouse, a new progressive building type, was envisioned during a time when the physical, moral, and mental welfare of the people was a growing concern of the day, especially in urban industrial areas.

Historically, there were 22 independent park districts serving the City of Chicago. On May 1, 1934, following the passage of the Chicago Park District Act, the 22 park districts were consolidated into one, the Chicago Park District.

In 1891, when J. Frank Foster became the superintendent of Chicago's South Park Commission, large expansive parks for leisure were the order of the day, like New York's Central Park, and the South Park Commission's Jackson and Washington Parks. These remote, beautifully designed parks typically did not serve the working class. Foster had a vision to bring parks and programs to the working people of Chicago.

Foster is credited with developing the nation's first neighborhood parks, referring to them as "small parks". His forward-thinking proposition for "small parks" included: a ball field large enough for two games to be played at the same time, a running track, sand pits, swimming pool, wading pool, and outdoor gymnasiums. His plan also included provisions for a neighborhood center building, open

day and evening, with indoor gymnasiums and assembly hall and club rooms—what came to be known as the "fieldhouse."

The South Park Commissioners embraced the idea that establishing useful as well as ornamental parks would be the most important factor in addressing overcrowded urban areas. "The neighborhood center embodies the highest practical type of public service in a park. The South Park District presents, in its new recreation area, the first complete expression of this idea" (South Park Commission Proceedings, 1904). The parks were to be neighborhood centers, providing much needed public services. The fieldhouse, a new building type, was designed to provide for intellectual and social life, not only in summer, but also during the long winters.

A site, which became known as McKinley Park, was acquired for an experimental neighborhood park in 1903 near the Stock Yards. Many of the features suggested by Foster were included. McKinley Park was such an immediate success that the South Park Commissioners decided in 1903 to establish a system of 14 neighborhood parks.





These parks provided social services such as bathing facilities, low cost hot meals, English lessons for adults and children, vocational training, recreation opportunities, athletics and cultural events.

To fulfill Foster's vision, the South Park Commissioners engaged Fredrick Law Olmstead, Jr. and John Charles Olmstead for landscape designs, and Daniel H. Burnham and Company for the new building type designs. Burnham hired a new designer, Edward Bennett, for the fieldhouse project. Bennett created neo-classical architectural designs for the fieldhouses.

The building material of the new buildings was reinforced concrete which had become known as "popcorn concrete" or "marblecrete." The classical detailing was limited due to the rough nature of the material.

Foster's plans were subsequently recorded in the South Park's Annual Report of 1905, which stated:

1. To take children from the streets and alleys and give them a better environment and safer place in which to play. This will relieve parents of care and anxiety concerning the safety of children. Truck driver, street-car, policeman and others whom are indirectly involved in care of children will also be relieved.
2. To encourage working boys and girls and adults to spend their idle hours in a wholesome environment and away from questionable amusements.
3. To encourage working boys and girls and adults to give attention to personal hygiene, exercise and bathing.
4. To furnish wholesome amusements for adults and others who do not participate in the activities of gymnasium, athletic and playfields. (South Park Commission Annual Report, 1905)

In a brief period of time—some of the new fieldhouses were only open for six months or less—it became clear that this new building type was a success and had a bright future. "The liberal use of the different facilities as shown by the reports of the Superintendent and the Director of Athletics confirms that the Commissioners had in benefits that would come from the installation of the Neighborhood Center Buildings, with their accessories, viz: gymnasiums, baths, reading rooms, assembly halls and branches of the Public Library. The fact that over 1,200,000 (people of all ages) used the Field Houses in the short time that they have been in service demonstrates the necessity for them is indicative of their future usefulness." (South Park Commission Annual Report, 1905)

The success of Chicago's neighborhood parks set a precedent for the development of neighborhood parks throughout the United States. The immediate success of the South Park Commission's "small parks" encouraged the Playground Association of America to hold its first annual convention in Chicago in 1907. President Theodore Roosevelt issued a public statement suggesting that municipalities send representatives to the conference..."to see the magnificent system that Chicago has erected in the South Park district, one of the most notable achievements of any American city". (South Park Commission Annual Report, 1908)

These parks provided social services such as bathing facilities, low cost hot meals, English lessons for adults and children, vocational training, recreation opportunities, athletics and cultural events. The fieldhouses also housed the earliest branches public libraries; there are still a few located in parks today. In addition to the social services



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provided within the fieldhouses, these parks were also a place where the Chicago working class could enjoy green, “breathable” spaces after long hours of work, and where ball fields, pools, and running tracks provided recreation and exercise. This effort of the park system represented a period in which residents and government alike had a shared goal of making the city a better place to live. The Chicago Park District continues to exemplify this goal today.

Parks and fieldhouses have always been important to Chicago and still are. In 1934, when the Chicago Park District was formed, there were 85 fieldhouses; today there are over 240. These fieldhouses are located throughout the city and range from ornate, historic buildings to modern athletic centers.

The original fieldhouses had gymnasiums, pools, locker rooms and showers, an auditorium and community rooms. Many of Chicago Park District's modern fieldhouses, like the fieldhouses at Ellis Park and Ping Tom Park, still feature these popular amenities.

Over the years, the Chicago Park District has also added specialty fieldhouses like boathouses, gymnastic centers, ice skating rinks, a bowling alley, and an environmental center. Two new athletic centers include indoor turf fields at Addams Park and a state-of-the art track and field facility at Gately Park.

Fieldhouse uses and programming continue to evolve. Early fieldhouses were built to provide a respite for working people. They provided recreational, social, cultural and educational programs, with wide-ranging offerings. Some of those program needs remain to this day, as do the programs that address those needs. Additionally, as the needs of the residents of Chicago have changed, so do program offerings in fieldhouses. In addition to classic fieldhouse athletic program offerings like basketball, swimming, and gymnastics, there are fieldhouses that have fitness equipment, senior aquatics and exercise classes, kiddie college, teen leadership programs and teen clubs, to name a few. Also there are cultural programs utilizing fieldhouse auditoriums and studios such as dance, music, theater and performing arts, visual and media arts. Specialty centers in fieldhouses have programs such as culinary training, ceramics, lapidary, photography, and woodworking. We also partner with other public agencies and private partners to enhance these program options.

The Chicago Park District continually adapts to address the changing needs and interests of its patrons, adding new programs, and repurposing facilities. The Chicago Park District Fieldhouses continue to serve as hubs for recreational, cultural and social programming and educational opportunities for the people of Chicagoland.

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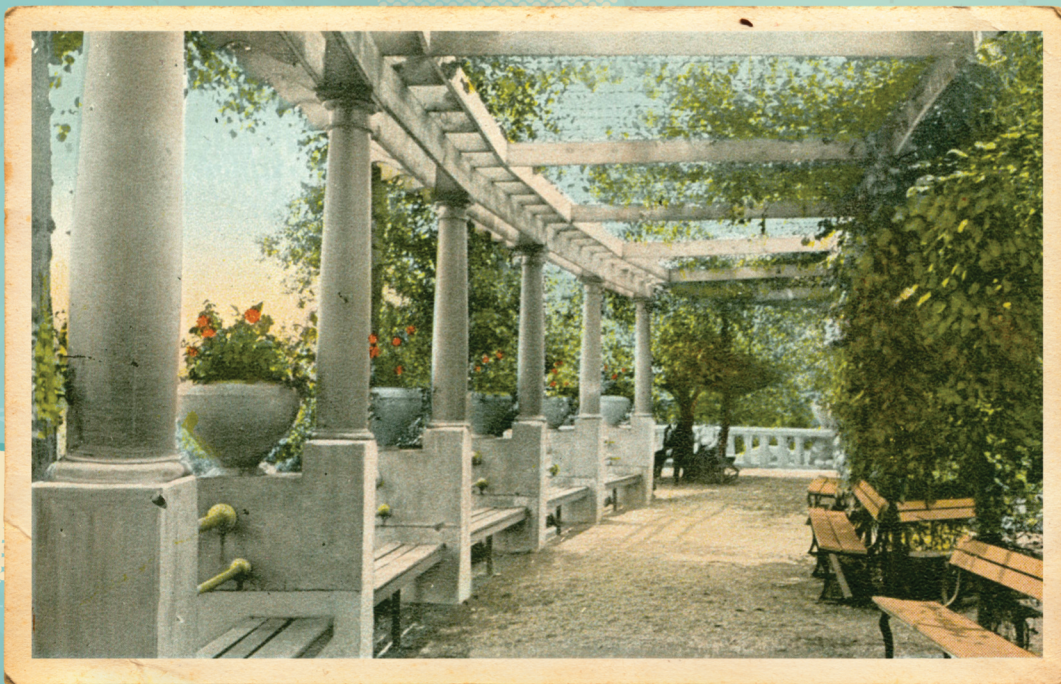
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The official publications of Illinois Association of Park Districts and Illinois Park and Recreation Association

Laura Bradley Park

THE BIRTH OF ILLINOIS' FIRST PARK DISTRICT.



In 1893, the Illinois General Assembly passed an enabling act for the creation of park districts within the state. Peoria leapt at the opportunity, and, in 1894, the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria Illinois was formed – the first in the state. One of the principal drivers of that formation was Lydia Moss Bradley, who donated the land that became one of the first of the new district's parks: Laura Bradley Park.



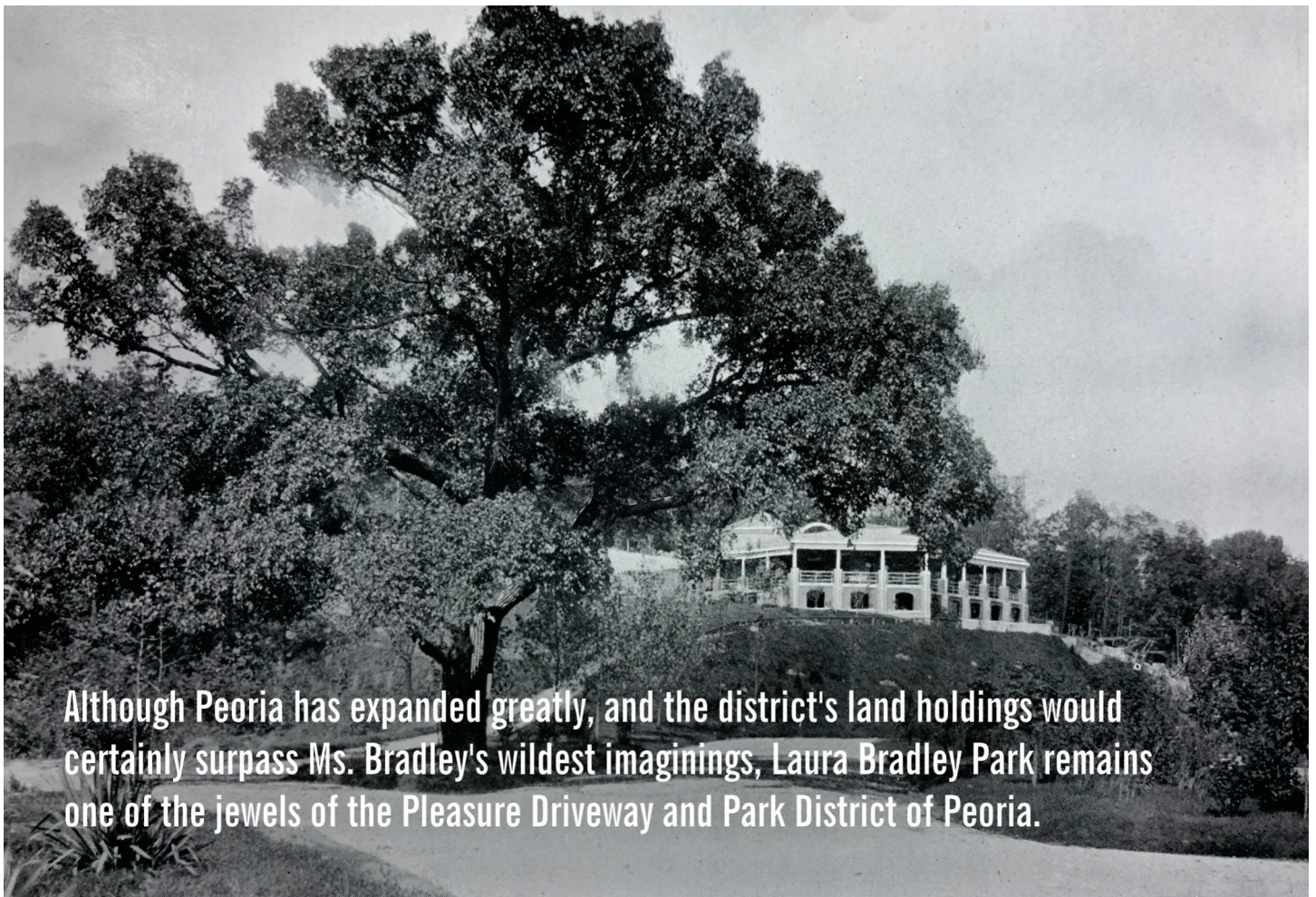
Today, Laura Bradley Park comprises 118 acres and serves as one of several regional parks in the Peoria Park District. Its wooded slopes, winding roads, and even fields provide an array of active and passive recreation opportunities. But sometimes forgotten is the key role it played in the formation of the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria.

In the late 1800s, Peoria was booming. The city was a powerhouse in industries such as distilling, cattle, manufacturing, and finance. The well-to-do of Peoria saw the development of park systems in Chicago and on the East Coast and felt Peoria's status would be improved by having its own park system. Lydia Moss Bradley, an astute businesswoman (and probably the richest woman in the United States at the time) had donated land to the City of Peoria in 1881 for a public park. However, the City had not acted on the donation, and the land remained unused. As the clamor grew for the formation of a park district, Lydia Moss Bradley revoked her donation to the city and instead offered the land as a donation to a future park district.

Thus, the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria was born in 1894, with the promise of significant acreage before the first park district taxes had even been levied.

Lydia Moss Bradley was a shrewd financier and real estate magnate in an era when women could not even vote. The donated parkland was immediately adjacent to land she had been actively marketing for residential development. The promise of a park next door immediately raised land prices, benefitting her financial empire greatly. The name Bradley may also be familiar to many from Bradley University. Bradley University was also founded by Lydia Moss Bradley, and is in the same neighborhood, less than a quarter mile away from the park.

Lydia Moss Bradley had several stipulations in her transfer of property to the fledgling district. First, the park was to be named Laura Bradley Park, in memory of her daughter who died at age 14. Second, there were to be no use of intoxicating liquors or games of chance allowed in the park. Finally, the park district was required to immediately begin improvements to the park to open it to the public as soon as possible.



Although Peoria has expanded greatly, and the district's land holdings would certainly surpass Ms. Bradley's wildest imaginings, Laura Bradley Park remains one of the jewels of the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria.

Laura Bradley Park is blessed and cursed in equal measures by the waterway called Dry Run Creek. This “creek” drains a large portion of the urban area of present-day Peoria. During dry times, the creek presents charming, pleasant scenery. During rainfall anywhere within the city however, the creek becomes a raging torrent. The early history of the district is filled with expenses for bridge replacements, retaining walls, and cleanup related to the attempts to tame the creek.

One of the first tasks of the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria was the employment of a landscape architect to design the new parks. The Park Board offered the job to Oscar Dubuis. Dubuis had been working with W.L.B. Jenney on the West Chicago park system (and was later succeeded by Jens Jensen) before coming to Peoria. His designs for Laura Bradley Park, Glen Oak Park, and Grand View Drive were very much in the “pleasure driveway” style. His hallmarks were winding carriage roadways, utilizing the hilly terrain to mask, and then surprise users with picturesque views. Dubuis deliberately (and brilliantly) balanced the drives through the wild

natural areas with rustic accoutrements, and contrasted them with arrivals at formal and manicured areas with exotic flowers and plants.

One of the side-effects of the community's enthusiasm for the new park district was the profusion of questionable donations. Herds of elk, deer, buffalo, prairie dogs, and even an alligator were donated to the park district. One can just imagine the designer Oscar Dubuis gritting his teeth looking at his careful masterplans and deciding where to put these enclosures. Laura Bradley Park became home to one of the district's new herds of elk. Realizing the value of centralizing livestock feed operations, the district's first maintenance buildings and stables were developed in the park to house work horse teams. This function remains to this day (albeit without the horses) as the Peoria Park District's equipment service and maintenance fleet remains based in Laura Bradley Park.

In 1918, a Japanese garden was constructed in the park. T.R. Otsuka, a Japanese Landscape Architect from Chicago was hired to design the garden. A teahouse, and arched

Japanese bridge across Dry Run Creek were soon added. During World War II, with anti-Japanese sentiment running high, the teahouse and garden were removed. Interestingly, a park district carpenter of the time took detailed measurements of the teahouse as he was disassembling it, and tucked away these plans in the district's maintenance shop. In 1986, the teahouse was rebuilt from these drawings by park district carpenters in the original location.

In the 1950's, Interstate 74 was routed through a portion of the park, resulting in an Illinois Supreme Court case regarding what the park district trustees felt was inadequate compensation for the taking of park land. This changed circulation patterns in the park, and resulted in a portion of the park to be orphaned by the interstate. This portion was eventually traded to Bradley University to provide a home for their men's soccer program.

Today, Laura Bradley Park offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities. The park contains six tennis courts, a baseball diamond, horseshoe courts, sand

volleyball, and three playgrounds for varying ages. It is also home to Bradley University's women's softball field, and one of the district's dog parks. Corn Stock Theatre, an outdoor community theater makes its home in the park. The park is also home to the district's only 18-hole disk golf course. Dry Run Creek remains a challenge, and several recent hundred-year storms within the City have punished the banks and walls of the creek. However, the bones of the original park layout remain. Most of the original roads are still present, and the views and mystique of the oak woods remain for the walkers, runners, disk golfers, dog walkers, and drivers of today.

Laura Bradley Park (and Lydia Moss Bradley) provided the impetus for the formation of Illinois' first and oldest park district. Although Peoria has expanded greatly, and the district's land holdings would certainly surpass Ms. Bradley's wildest imaginings, Laura Bradley Park remains one of the jewels of the Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria.



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PEOPLE & PLACES



Elaine Russell
Princeton Park District Executive Director Elaine Russell retired on November 30, 2020 after 27 years with the park district.

Russell spent 12 of her 27 years serving as executive director. She started at the park district in 1993 and was the person who opened the facility every morning at 5:30

a.m. She worked as business manager prior to her time as executive director.

She credits her success at the park district to board members, co-workers and the community of Princeton.



Tammy Lange to head Princeton Park District
Tammy Lange has been named Princeton Park District's new executive director.

Lange, a 12-year employee of the Princeton Park District, will replace Elaine Russell who retired on November 30, 2020 after 27 years with the park district.

Lange joined the Park District in September 2008 as assistant to the executive director. She has previous experience in Princeton banking and manufacturing firms.

Park Board President Andy Marti said she was selected due to her extensive background in both the park district and the community the park district serves. He added that she has shown commitment and loyalty to the park district and her experience with the procedures and practices of the park district are incredibly valuable.



Building Named After Former Rockford Park District Executive Director Tim Dimke

In 2017, the Rockford Park District celebrated the expansion of the Indoor Sports Center, 8800 E. Riverside Blvd., Loves Park. The 133,000-square-foot sports building situated to the east of the existing Indoor Sports Center (ISC) building is only 3-years-old and is 420 feet long, 300 feet wide, and 70 feet high, making it one of the largest sports complexes in the Midwest. Since then, this massive building has been commonly referred to as the "mega center" or "Field 3" but will now be called Dimke Field as a way to celebrate and recognize former Executive Director Tim Dimke who retired from the position in 2017.

Expanding Mercyhealth Sportscore Two campus was a legacy project spearheaded by Tim as part of Reclaiming First, an effort to retain, regain, and grow sports tourism.

Under Tim's leadership, the Rockford Park District had twice been awarded the prestigious National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management (1989 and 2012), and twice earning the Distinguished Agency accreditation from the Illinois Association of Park Districts and Illinois Park and Recreation Association.

PEOPLE & PLACES

In Memorium



Illinois Parks & Recreation extends our condolences to the family of **Glen Ekey**, who passed away in October 2020.

Glen Ekey served as executive director of the Naperville Park District from 1981 to 1996. His tenure occurred during a period of rapid growth in the community when the population expanded from approximately 45,000 to more than 118,000. Under his

leadership, the park district grew in scope as well, with 123 parks across 2,300 acres; the district also opened Naperbrook Golf Course in 1991.

Ekey, a proponent of parks and recreation, envisioned a community with abundant parkland and open space to serve

the current and future recreation needs of the community. It is because of his vision that the park district was able to purchase much of the park land that our residents enjoy today.

Procuring park land was just one of his many contributions to the park district and the community. He also was the founder of Naperville's Ribfest event, which ran from 1987-2019.

In his free time, Ekey was an avid golfer. To honor his contributions to the park district and recognize his love for the sport, in May 2013, the driving range at Naperbrook Golf Course was named for him and a celebration was held to officially rename the facility the "Glen Ekey Driving Range."

He was a friend and mentor to many and made a significant and lasting impact on the community he called home.

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*—Oakbrook Terrace
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ACCOUNTANTS

Lauterbach & Amen, LLP

Ron Amen
668 N. River Road
Naperville, IL 60563
630-393-1483 PH
ramen@lauterbachamen.com
www.lauterbachamen.com

Sikich LLP

Frederick Lantz
1415 West Diehl Road
Suite 400
Naperville, IL 60563
630-566-8400 PH
flantz@sikich.com
www.sikich.com

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630-771-1310 PH
tom@aquapure-il.com
www.aquapure-IL.com

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Chicago, IL 60630
773-286-6300 PH
rhellgeth@halogensupply.com
www.halogensupply.com

Spear Corporation

Sam Blake
12966 North 50 West
Roachdale, IN 46172
765-577-3100 PH
sblake@spearcorp.com
www.spearcorp.com

ARCHITECTS/ ENGINEERS

Charles Vincent George Architects

Bruce George
1245 E. Diehl Road
Suite 101
Naperville, IL 60563
630-357-2023 PH
bgeorge@cvgarchitects.com
www.cvgarchitects.com

Dewberry Architects Inc.

Daniel Atilano
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Elmhurst, IL 60126
847-841-0571 PH
datilano@dewberry.com
www.dewberry.com

DLA Architects, Ltd.

Lou Noto
Two Pierce Place
Suite 1300
Itasca, IL 60143
847-742-4063 PH
l.noto@dla-ltd.com
www.dla-ltd.com

Eriksson Engineering Associates

Michael Renner
145 Commerce Drive
Suite A
Grayslake, IL 60030
847-223-4804 PH
mrenner@eea-ltd.com
www.eea-ltd.com

Farnsworth Group, Inc.

Bruce Brown
100 Walnut Street
Suite 200
Peoria, IL 61602
309-689-9888 PH
bbrown@f-w.com
www.f-w.com

FGM Architects, Inc.

John Dzarnowski
1211 W. 22nd Street
Suite 705
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630-574-8300 PH
johnd@fgmarchitects.com
www.fgmarchitects.com

Gewalt Hamilton Associates, Inc.

Tom Rychlik
625 Forest Edge Dr.
Vernon Hills, IL 60061
847-478-9700 PH
trychlik@gha-engineers.com
www.gha-engineers.com

HR Green

Dave Reitz
420 N. Front St., Suite 100
McHenry, IL 60050
815-385-1778 PH
dreitz@hrgreen.com
www.hrgreen.com

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Alyssa Scheuneman
201 W. Springfield Ave.
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Champaign, IL 61820
217-531-4964 PH
ascheuneman@msa-ps.com
www.msa-ps.com

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Rocco Castellano
30 N Vincennes Circle
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312-925-0907 PH
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Sheehan Nagle Hartray Architects

Eric Penney
130 E Randolph, Suite 3100
Chicago, IL 60601
312-633-2900 PH
eric@snh-a.com
www.snh-a.com

Stantec Consulting Services Inc.

Jim Maland
733 Marquette Ave.
Suite 1000
Minneapolis, MN 55402
651-636-4600 ext 4759 PH
jim.maland@stantec.com
www.stantec.com

Studio 222 Architects

Tim Schmitt
222 S. Morgan St., Ste 4B
Chicago, IL 60607
312-850-4970 PH
tschmitt@studio222architects.com
www.studio222architects.com

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Robert Ijams
2500 N. Frontage Rd
Darien, IL 60561
630-739-6644 PH
rijams@wightco.com
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500 Park Boulevard, Suite 800
Itasca, IL 60143
630-221-1212 PH
ktlellios@williams-architects.com
www.williams-architects.com

WT Group

Troy Triphahn
2675 Pratum Ave.
Hoffman Estates, IL 60192
224-293-6333 PH
Troy.Triphahn@wtengineering.com
www.wtengineering.com

ATTORNEYS

Ancel Glink

Derke Price
140 South Dearborn Street
6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603
312-782-7606 PH
dprice@ancelglink.com
www.ancelglink.com

Brooks, Tarulis & Tibble, LLC

Rick Tarulis
1733 Park Street, Suite 100
Naperville, IL 60563
630-355-2101 PH
rtarulis@napervillelaw.com
www.napervillelaw.com

IAPD CORPORATE/ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Chapman and Cutler LLP

Kelly Kost
111 W. Monroe St.
Chicago, IL 60603
312-845-3814 PH
kost@chapman.com
www.chapman.com

Hervas, Condon & Bersani, P.C.

Michael Bersani
333 Pierce Rd., Suite 195
Itasca, IL 60143
630-773-4774 PH
mbersani@hcbattorneys.com
www.hcbattorneys.com

Ice Miller LLP

Shelly Scinto
200 West Madison Street,
#3500
Chicago, IL 60606
312-726-8116 PH
Shelly.Scinto@icemiller.com
www.icemiller.com

Littler Mendelson PC

Christopher Johlle
321 N. Clark St., Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60654
312-795-3230 PH
cjoהלle@littler.com
www.littler.com

Montana Welch, LLC

Erin Blake
11950 S. Harlem Avenue
Suite 102
Palos Heights, IL 60463

Robbins Schwartz

Steven Adams
631 E. Boughton Road,
#200
Bolingbrook, IL 60440
630-929-3639 PH
sadams@robbins-
schwartz.com
www.robbins-schwartz.com

Tressler LLP

Andrew Paine
233 S. Wacker Drive,
61st FL
Chicago, IL 60606
312-627-4154 PH
apaine@tresslerllp.com
www.tresslerllp.com

AUDIO/VISUAL/ PHOTOGRAPHY

Jaffe, Inc.

Greg Bizzaro
1701 Quincy Ave., Suite 2
Naperville, IL 60540
630-730-3777 PH
greg@jaffeinc.com
www.jaffeinc.com

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866-996-7412 PH
CGoodman@ssci2000.com
www.ssci2000.com

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sean.durkin@53.com
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Jim Such
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CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

Byrne and Jones Construction

Britton Taulbee
13940 St. Charles Rock Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63044
314-567-7997
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Corporate Construction Services

Michael Rink
1323 Butterfield Rd.
Suite 110
Downers Grove, IL 60515
630-271-0500 PH
ccs@corporateconstruction
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Frederick Quinn Corporation

Jack Hayes
103 South Church Street
Addison, IL 60101
630-628-8500 PH
jhayes@fquinncorp.com
www.fquinncorp.com/

Henry Bros. Co.

Marc Deneau
9821 S. 78th Ave.
Hickory Hills, IL 60457
708-430-5400 PH
mdeneau@henrybros.com
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Lamp Incorporated

Ian Lamp
460 N. Grove Ave.
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847-741-7220 PH
ilamp@lampinc.net
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Norwalk Concrete Industries

Scott Kinnamon
80 Commerce Drive
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800-733-3624 PH
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V3 Companies

Greg Wolterstorff
7325 Janes Ave.
Woodridge, IL 60517
630-729-6334 PH
gwolterstorff@v3co.com
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CONSULTANTS

aQity Research & Insights, Inc.

Jeff Andreasen
820 Davis. St., Suite 502
Evanston, IL 60201
847-424-4171 PH
j.andreasen@aqityresearch.com
www.aqityresearch.com

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217-741-2489 PH
CKulek@ameren.com
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IAPD CORPORATE/ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

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630-437-4610 PH
Amy.Populorum@ComEd.com
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Dale Snyder
7704 Oakridge Rd.
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501-835-3142 PH
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Chicago, IL 60613
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Bryan Green
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bgreen@accessoneinc.com
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Larry Widmer
225 W. Wacker Dr., 8th Floor
Chicago, IL 60606
312-496-6693 PH
lwidmer@callone.com
www.callone.com

Links Technology Solutions, Inc.

James Burke
440 East State Parkway
Suite 220
Schaumburg, IL 60173
847-252-7285 PH
jburke@linkstechnology.com
www.linkstechnology.com

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847-691-1665 PH
joe@serveandprotectlaw.com
www.serveandprotectlaw.com

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at ahoward@ilparks.org for updates
or changes to your corporate
member listing.

IPRA COMMERCIAL MEMBERS

AQUATICS

AQUATIC COUNCIL, LLC

Timothy Auerhahn, CPOI
78 Lyndale Drive
Rochester, NY 14624
tim@aquaticcouncil.com
585-415-6926 PH
aquaticcouncil.com

JEFF ELLIS AND ASSOCIATES, INC.

Joe Stefanyak
PO Box 2160
Windermere, FL 34786
joe.stefanyak@jellis.com
407-401-7120 PH
jellis.com

JUST IN TIME POOL & SPA

Michael Butkovich
121 Eisenhower Lane
Lombard, IL 60148
justintimepool@yahoo.com
312-622-2223 PH

LINCOLN AQUATICS

Charlie Luecker
2051 Commerce Ave
Concord, CA 94520-4950
cs@lincolnaquatics.com
800-223-5450 PH
lincolnaquatics.com

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Kevin Harrington
36 Pine Street
Rockaway, NJ 07866
kharrington@pettitpaint.com
800-745-6756 PH
ramucpoolpaint.com

SPEAR CORPORATION

Brian Spear
12966 N County Road 50 W
Roachdale, IN 46172-9538
bspear@spearcorp.com
765-522-1126 PH
spearcorp.com

STARGUARD ELITE

Jessica Gray
420 S. Orange Ave.
Orlando, FL 32801
info@starguardelite.com
407-256-8087 PH
starguardelite.com

VORTEX AQUATIC STRUCTURES INTERNATIONAL

Scott Stefanc
11024 Bailey Road, Suite C
Cornelius, NC, 28031
sstefanc@vortex-intl.com
877-586-7839 PH
vortex-intl.com

BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION

BID EVOLUTION

Steve Kulovits
1905 Sequoia Dr.
Suite 201
Aurora, IL 60506
stevek@bidevolution.com
630-450-8360 PH
bidevolution.com

FREDERICK QUINN CORP

Jack Hayes
103 S. Church St.
Addison, IL 60101
jhayes@fquinncorp.com
630-628-8500 PH
fquinncorp.com

INTEGRAL CONSTRUCTION INC.

Christopher Osinski
320 Rocbaar Drive
Romeoville, IL 60446
cosinski@buildintegral.com
844-317-7403 PH

LAMP INCORPORATED

Ian Lamp
460 N. Grove Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120
ilamp@lampinc.net
847-741-7220 (305) PH
lampinc.net

STALKER SPORTS FLOORS

Steve Stalker
1215 W Waupaca St.
New London, WI 54961-1049
info@stalkersportsfloors.com
800-831-8773 PH
stalkersportsfloors.com

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

APPLE CANYON LAKE PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

Ashlee Miller
14A157 Canyon Club Dr
Apple River, IL 61001-9576
Ashlee.Miller@applecanyonlake.org
815-492-2238 PH
applecanyonlake.org

CONCESSIONS

MIDWEST EQUIPMENT COMPANY:

TAYLOR, FLAVOR BURST & BROASTER
Mitch Brechon
2511 Cassens Dr.
Fenton, MO 63026
mbrechon@taylormidwest.com
815-980-0789 PH
taylormidwest.com

CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT

FEATHERSTONE, INC.

Mike Carpenter, LEED AP
4610 Roslyn Rd.
Downers Grove, IL 60515-5809
mikec@featherstoneinc.com
847-271-6021 PH
featherstoneinc.com

COOPERATIVE PURCHASING CONTRACTS

SOURCEWELL

Jon Henke
202 12th Street NE
P.O. Box 219
Staples, MN 56479
Jon.henke@sourcewell-mn.gov
218-541-5102 PH
sourcewell-mn.gov

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

COMED

Amy Populorum
2011 Swift Dr
Oak Brook, IL 60523-1580
Amy.Populorum@ComEd.com
630-891-7430 PH
comed.com

MIDWEST MECHANICAL

Jaylen Thompson
801 Parkview Boulevard
Lombard, IL 60148
jaylen.thompson@midwestmech.com
630-280-6262 PH
midwestmech.com

ENTERTAINMENT & EVENT SERVICES

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Chris Manski
506 S. Westgate St.
Addison, 60101
chris@awesomeamusements.com
630-953-2866 PH
awesomeamusements.com

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Coleen Geary
PO Box 303
Wasco, IL 60183-0303
Coleen.Geary@FloodsRoyalFlush.com
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floodsroyalflush.com

MELROSE PYROTECHNICS

Jonathan Gesse
PO Box 302
Kingsbury, IN 46345
jon@melrosepyro.com
219-393-5522 PH
melrosepyro.com

FINANCE

5/3 Fifth Third Bank

Sean Patrick Durkin
1151 State St.
Lemont, IL 60439-4200
Sean.Durkin@53.com
630-297-5987 PH
53.com

LAUTERBACH & AMEN, LLP

Ron Amen
668 N. River Road
Naperville, IL 60563
ramen@lauterbachamen.com
630-393-1483 PH
lauterbachamen.com

SPEER FINANCIAL

Aaron Gold
One North LaSalle
Suite 4100
Chicago, IL 60602
agold@speerfinancial.com
312-780-2280 PH
speerfinancial.com

STIFEL

Tom Reedy
70 West Madison St.
Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602
reedyt@stifel.com
312-423-8245 PH
stifel.com

WINTRUST FINANCIAL CORPORATION

Aimee Briles
9700 W. Higgins Road
4th Floor
Rosemont, IL 60018
abriles@wintrust.com
630-560-2120 PH
wintrust.com

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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Trent Matthias
415 Jackson St.
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John Neberz
1501 E. Woodfield Road
Suite 200W
Schaumburg, IL 60173
jneberz@central.com
847-330-5385 PH
centralmosquitocontrol.com

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Craig Soncrant
307 N. Michigan Ave., #601
Chicago, IL 60601
csoncrant@thinkconfluence.com
312-663-5494 PH
thinkconfluence.com

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1410 Mills Rd.
Joliet, IL 60433
bridget@georgeslandscaping.com
815-774-0350 PH
georgeslandscaping.com

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Bernard Schroeder
23940 Andrew Road
Plainfield, IL 60585
sandy@green-up.com
815-372-3000 PH
green-up.com

NELS JOHNSON TREE EXPERTS

Chris Beiser
912 Pitner Ave
Evanston, IL 60202
cbeiser@nelsjohnsonstree.com
847-475-1877 PH
nelsjohnsonstree.com

THE DAVEY TREE EXPERT COMPANY

Mandy McCauley
1375 E Woodfield Rd., Ste 204
Schaumburg, IL 60173-5424
mandy.mccauley@davey.com
630-422-1870 PH
davey.com

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Deerfield, IL 60015
jim@mulchcenter.com
847-459-7200 PH
mulchcenter.com

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Oskaloosa, IA 52577-3244
nick.mauer@musco.com
800-825-6030 PH
musco.com

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1 North La Salle Street
47th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602
jharris@a5inc.com
312-706-2525 PH
a5inc.com

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Eric Lee Wilson, CPRP
1137 E. Woodrow Ave
Lombard, IL 60148
ericlee@excelaerialimagesllc.com
224-775-4623 PH
excelaerialimages.com

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Temple, TX 76502
bhuckabay@izoneimaging.com
888-464-9663 PH
izoneimaging.com

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2 Industrial Drive
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kevin@americana.com
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Suite 300
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michele@cunninghamrec.com
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cunninghamrec.com

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sales@discountplaygroundsupply.com
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discountplaygroundsupply.com

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Jonathan Huard
175 N. Industrial Blvd NE
Calhoun, GA 30701
jonathan.huard@fieldturf.com
630-474-9817 PH
fieldturf.com

PLAY & PARK STRUCTURES

Steve Casada
303 Bass St.
Park Hills, MO 63601
scasada@playandpark.com
573-631-1968 PH

PLAY & PARK STRUCTURES OF NORTHERN IL/PLAY & PARK STRUCTURES

Patrick Puebla
4516 21st Avenue
Moline, IL 61265
ppuebla@playandpark.com
309-339-0536 PH

PLAY ILLINOIS

Michael Maloney
310 N Grant St.
Westmont, IL 60559-1505
mike@playil.com
630-514-5405 PH
playil.com

PLANNING & DESIGN

CARDNO

Angie Richter
6605 W Steger Rd, Ste A
Monee, IL 60449-7044
angie.richter@cardno.com
708-627-8018 PH
cardno.com

DEUHLER ENGINEERING CORPORATION

Pat Kelsey
230 Woodlawn Ave
Aurora, IL 60506-5194
pkelsey@deuchler.com
630-423-0482 PH
deuchler.com

DEWBERRY ARCHITECTS INC.

Daniel Atilano
132 N York St
Elmhurst, IL 60126-3079
datilano@dewberry.com
847-841-0571 PH
dewberry.com

FGM ARCHITECTS

John Dzarnowski
1211 W. 22nd Street
Suite 705
Oakbrook, IL 60523
johnd@fgmarchitects.com
630-574-8300 PH
fgmarchitects.com

GEWALT HAMILTON ASSOCIATES

Michael Shrake
625 Forest Edge Drive
Vernon Hills, IL 60061
mshrake@gha-engineers.com
847-478-9700 PH
gha-engineers.com

HITCHCOCK DESIGN GROUP

Bill Inman
225 W. Jefferson Ave
Naperville, IL 60540
binman@hitchcockdesigngroup.com
630-961-1787 PH
hitchcockdesigngroup.com

INSPEC, INC

Dave Foler
8618 W. Catalpa, Suite 1109-1110
Chicago, IL 60656
dfoler@inspec.com
773-892-2771 PH
inspec.com

JSD PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, INC.

Lori Vierow
1400 E Touhy Ave
Ste 215
Des Plaines, IL 60018-3339
lori.vierow@jsdinc.com
630-362-6681 PH
jsdinc.com

IPRA COMMERCIAL MEMBERS

MANHARD CONSULTING

Matt Nelson, PLA, ASLA,
LEED AP
One Overlook Point, Suite 290
Lincolnshire, IL 60069
mnelson@manhard.com
630-925-1047 PH
www.Manhard.com

OLSON ECOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

2221 Hammond Dr
Schaumburg, IL 60173-3813
rebecca@olsonecosolutions.com
815-985-2689 PH
olsonecosolutions.com

PLANNING RESOURCES INC.

Darrell Garrison
913 Parkview Blvd
Lombard, IL 60148-3267
dgarrison@planres.com
630-668-3788 PH
planres.com

SMITHGROUP

Brett Weidl
35 E. Wacker Drive
Suite 900
Chicago, IL 60601
brett.weidl@smithgroup.com
312-641-0770 PH
www.smithgroup.com

STUDIO PARK AVE

Benjamin Kutscheid
685 Park Ave W
Highland Park, IL 60035-2425
ben@StudioParkAve.com
847-217-5076 PH
studioparkave.com

TBDA

Tom Bassett-Dilley
216 Harrison St
Oak Park, IL 60304-1534
info@tbdarchitects.com
708-434-0381 PH
tbdarchitects.com

THE LARSON EQUIPMENT AND FURNITURE COMPANY

Dave Dillon
1000 E. State Parkway, Unit F
Schaumburg, IL 60173
ddillon@larsoncompany.com
847-705-0460 PH
larsoncompany.com

WATERMARK ENGINEERING RESOURCES

Kenneth M. Price
2631 Ginger Woods Pkwy
Suite 100
Aurora, IL 60502
kprice@watermark-engineering.com
630-375-1800 PH
watermark-engineering.com

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Robert Ijams
2500 N. Frontage Road
Darien, IL 60561
rijams@wightco.com
630-739-6644 PH
wightco.com

WILLIAMS ARCHITECTS

Olga Henderson
500 Park Blvd.
Suite 800
Itasca, IL 60143
ohhenderson@williamsarchitects.com
630-221-1212 PH
williams-architects.com

WT GROUP

Jaclyn Triphahn
2675 Pratum Avenue
Hoffman Estates, IL 60192
Jaclyn.Triphahn@wtengineering.com
224-293-6333 PH
wtengineering.com

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Rick Gurrieri
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Robert Bush
140 S. Dearborn Street
6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60603
rbush@ancelglink.com
312-604-9105 PH
ancelglink.com

BERRYDUNN

Dannielle Wilson
100 Middle St
4th Floor East Tower
Portland, ME 04101
DWilson@BerryDunn.com
207-842-8121 PH
berrydunn.com

GREG PETRY CONSULTING

Greg Petry, CPRE
474 Glendenning Place
Waukegan, IL 60087
greg@gregpetryconsulting.com
847-287-4721 PH

HR SOURCE

Christopher Schneider
3025 Highland Parkway
Suite 225
Downers Grove, IL 60515
cschneider@hrsource.org
630-963-7600 x232 PH

ILLINOIS PUBLIC RISK FUND

Robert Buhs
7851 W. 185th Street
Suite 101
Tinley Park, IL 60477
rbuhs@iprf.com
708-429-6300 PH
iprf.com

PDRMA

Brett Davis
2033 Burlington Avenue
Lisle, IL 60532
bdavis@pdrma.org
630-769-0332 PH
pdrma.org

TRANE

Aaron Raftery
7100 S. Madison St.
Willowbrook, IL 60527
aaron.raftery@irco.com
630-203-7007 PH
irco.com

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Donald Meeker
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Mamaroneck, NY 10543-0767
don@terrabil.com
914-341-1500 PH
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federalsupply.com

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ciarra@andrewstechnology.com
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andrewstechnology.com

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141 Dayton St, Ste 204
Ridgewood, NJ 07450-4430
tbracken@capturepoint.com
201-689-2323 ext: 202 PH
communitypass.net

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Matthew Petrasanta
4333 Still Creek Drive, 2nd Floor
Burnaby, BC V5C 6S6, Canada
matthew.petrasanta@perfectmind.com
877-737-8030 x1 PH
perfectmind.com

RAM COMMUNICATIONS INC.

Rob McCoy
2720 S River Rd., Ste 152
Des Plaines, IL 60018-4111
info@ramcomminc.com
847-358-0917 PH
ramcomminc.com

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Stephania Buteyn
16142 W Blackhawk Dr.
Lockport, IL 60441-4352
stephania@thinkingkaplearning.com
708-414-0888 PH
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