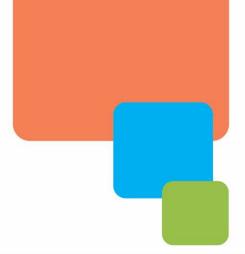
The magazine of the Illinois Association of Park Districts and the Illinois Park and Recreation Association

illinois







What an IPARKS Membership Means to You!



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Photo Credit: South Barrington Park District

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FROM THE **EDITOR**

You Spoke... And We Listened!

Last year, we conducted a Readership Survey to get a pulse on what our members wanted out of Illinois Parks and Recreation. We were delighted to get such a positive and strong response.



Over the next year, you will notice some changes to IP&R magazine. Stories will be more concise and offer information that can be utilized by all readers, from directors to commissioners and everyone in between.

Additionally, we are adding new features to our digital edition of the magazine. Articles will now have a QR code at the end for easy sharing. If you find a story of value, you will now be able to use the QR code to generate a link to the direct page where the article begins.

We also heard you when you said you wanted each issue of the magazine to come out earlier, and we will now deliver each issue on the first month shown on the cover for more timely delivery of information.

We are always looking for feedback from you, our valued readers. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly at wutterback@ilparks.org with your thoughts!

I hope you enjoy this issue, which examines the importance of working with legislators. Featured is a Question and Answer article from three different executive directors on how they have developed powerful relationships with their local legislators to create a larger impact in parks and recreation. We also have an article from Carol Sente, who has worked both in parks and recreation and also served as an Illinois State Representative. Her unique perspective sheds light on the benefits of having long-lasting connections in state government.

Thank you for reading!

- Wayne Utterback, Editor



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GET ON BOARD

EXPLORING BEST PRACTICES FOR GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

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

ONBOARDING NEW COMMISSIONERS: EXTENDING A HELPING HAND

With a successful state conference concluded, IAPD continues to hit the ground running with a number of great educational opportunities for board members and professionals alike. Legislative Breakfasts, Parks Day at the Capitol, the Legislative Conference, the initiation of new member-centric research, and the IAPD Commissioner Boot Camps are all scheduled for you to take advantage of this Spring.

Odd numbered years usher in the season of park board elections and many agencies will be welcoming new members to their boards. Helping these new members with onboarding is the key to the continuity of good governance.

The first step should be to take the time to walk each new board member through the information which forms the basis of your organization. I would suggest that you first share those "need to know" documents which command your board's closest attention.

Share the **bylaws** that clarify the big picture for the board, including its main policies and organizational structure.

Explain how your **individual policies** paraphrase a law, explain a procedure, clarify a principle, or interpret a particular bylaw. They are the protocol to follow and help eliminate embarrassing situations, improper behavior and ineffective decision-making. A park district usually has board-related policies as well as personnel, and financial policies, and while the chief executive is responsible for personnel and office procedures, the board ensures that they are reviewed and are adequate to meet the needs of the district.

Job descriptions for board members and the chief executive save the board from a multitude of misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Listing the expectations for individual board members as well as officers is a reminder for current and new members of their roles and responsibilities. Committee descriptions are to define what these groups are expected to accomplish. These are defined by the full board and help keep committee work on track.

Explain how agendas for board meetings help keep the board focused on issues that belong to it rather than on operational matters. Board meeting agendas guide the board's official business when its members get together to make governance decisions. Discuss with new members the consent agenda if you use one and how it works.

Meeting minutes are proof that the agenda has been accomplished. They record what occurred in your meeting. Each board member needs to read the draft and approve the contents at the next meeting. Be sure to also explain the executive session procedure and process, and how minutes that relate to it are reviewed.

Your **board manual** is the compilation of documents that new and current board members use as the foundation of good governance and the basis to learn how to fit into your board culture. No law demands that you have a manual, but it is a good practice as it provides your members with easy access to your documents. Making your manual available electronically is a great option for the use of computers or tablets by board members at meetings.

FOR A QUICK START, REVIEW:

- The agency's history
- · The district's organizational chart
- The meeting minutes from the past year
- The past six months financial reports
- · Last year's annual audit
- The board policy manual; and
- How the board interfaces with the agency's executive director

ON THE LAWS AFFECTING BOARD SERVICE. REVIEW **INITIALLY AND ANNUALLY THEREAFTER:**

- The Open Meetings Act
- The Public Officials Prohibited Activities Act
- Rules regarding Incompatibility of Office
- The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for its impact on board communications
- Law governing interference with public contracting
- Time off for official meetings; and
- The Truth in Taxation Act

PROVIDE ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What are the board members' fiduciary responsibilities including ways they can avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions of conflicts of interest?
- · What are the board members' responsibilities regarding meetings (before, during and after)?
- · What are the board members' responsibilities regarding relationships with staff?
- How does the board expect members to interact with the public during meetings, agency events or in general?
- What other general expectations does the board have of members?

I have found that it is helpful to use examples with the answers to each of these questions. As for a new board member, it provides real life context for them about the agency.

Share the **Board Member Code of Ethics** which can be found on the back of their new IAPD membership card as follows.

As a member of the board, I will:

- Represent the interests of all people in the community. I will not favor any particular special interests.
- Not use my service on this board for my own personal advantage or for the advantage of my friends or supporters.
- Keep privileged information confidential.
- Approach all board issues with an open mind, prepared to make the best decisions for everyone involved.
- Do nothing to violate the trust of those who elected or appointed me to the board or of those we serve.
- Focus on my efforts on the mission of the agency and not on my personal goals.
 - Never exercise authority as a board member except when acting in a meeting with the full board or as I am delegated by the board.

Finally, it is important to have a conversation about the board's culture so that new board members have an understanding of the expectations that the board will have of them as well as the expectations they should have of the board. Every board has a unique culture, and it is advantageous to good board governance that this culture be shared as

quickly as possible.

Many times, new board members may be surprised to learn that they have no individual authority. Even though they have individual responsibilities and legal duties, unlike other boards they may be familiar with, pointing out that authority is vested in the board as a body is important to emphasize when rolling out the welcome mat.

A well thought out and effective onboarding process will make for a smooth transaction for your district. For more ideas on this and other good governance topics, visit the IAPD website at ILparks.org.

To help new board members hit the ground running and fulfill their Open Meetings Act requirements, send them to one of IAPD's commissioner Boot Camps. It is an investment that will pay big dividends.

~ Jack Welch



EYE ON THE **PROFESSION**

A CLOSER LOOK AT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN THE PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSION By Suzi Wirtz, IOM, IPRA Executive Director

RAISE YOUR HAND IF YOU ARE... A VOLUNTEER!

The first year of implementing a new strategic plan typically elicits a unique blend of excitement and challenge. With a clear vision, a dedicated Board and talented staff, IPRA was able to achieve remarkable milestones and lay a solid foundation for years to come. At the heart of it all, the IPRA mission remains unchanged – to serve the members and enhance the benefits and resources that support their professional growth. In addition, what remains the same—actually, seems to grow every year!—is the sheer number of volunteers that continue to raise their hands when asked to assist at IPRA.

As Board Chair Erika Strojinc said at the IPRA Annual Business Meeting, "One of my key priorities this year is to enhance the volunteer experience, making it more meaningful and valuable than ever before." I'm with her! The impact that volunteering has had on so many IPRA careers is immeasurable. From the IPRA ProConnect program to special interest sections, committees, virtual groups and other ways to play an active role at IPRA. In fact, volunteering ranked among the top five reasons members join IPRA, according to the latest IPRA membership survey. IPRA offers a wide variety of touchpoints for deeper engagement—whether it's attending events, participating in a committee, or connecting with colleagues across the state. The more the merrier, and especially because IPRA has a lot of work coming up this year ... and we are excited about our top priorities!

1. Online Member Connectivity - In 2024, we talked about several new tools and platforms designed to make member engagement easier and more efficient. One key project recently launched is the new IPRA online "CommUnity." This user-friendly platform, which can be easily accessed through member profiles, provides a central hub for connection, collaboration, and resource-sharing. The CommUnity platform is designed to enable members to communicate with each other, engage in discussions within your sections or committees, and upload and share valuable resources. I'm excited to see how it will continue to foster connections and professional growth across our community.

- 2. Digital Innovation and Learning Later this year, we will unveil an expansive digital learning initiative: IPRA University. This online learning management system (LMS) has been a long time in the making, and it will be a game-changer for members. The platform will host virtual learning modules, webinars, and other educational content, including career pathways and core competencies relevant to parks, rec and conservation. IPRA University will be accessible to not just members, but also nonmembers, extending our reach and impact. This system will provide opportunities for Continuing Education Units (CEUs), ensuring that you have access to the professional development you need.
- 3. Advancing Workforce Development One of the most important projects in 2025 is the Illinois Workforce Initiative, a direct result of IPRA's strategic plan. The workforce challenge in the parks, recreation, and conservation field is something we have been addressing head-on, and this initiative is a vital step in ensuring the future strength and growth of our industry. IPRA is developing a comprehensive suite of resources for agencies, from digital toolkits, marketing materials, social media campaigns, and more, all designed to help you promote the field of parks, recreation, and conservation to a wide range of audiences from students to individuals seeking to change careers. Members will soon have access to these resources, enabling you to showcase how Illinois is the best place to work in parks and recreation!

Connection is Key

So ... what's your passion? What are some special skills that you'd like to bring to your professional community? Any goals to meet new people and elevate your career in 2025? Please visit the IPRA website, check out the sections and committees and decide to attend events that will help you in ways you cannot begin to imagine. (But just ask any IPRA member, they will tell you!) The IPRA website also has an easy-to-find calendar that outlines all the events you can choose from to connect with other incredible professionals in the field.

Volunteering is meaningful, it's personal and it is the backbone of IPRA. It's how we connect, learn and build the future of parks and recreation. Make no mistake: your contributions matter, and IPRA needs members like you.

IPRA has a lot to look forward to, and I could not be more proud to be part of all the great initiatives this year. With continued collaboration, dedication, and a clear focus on member needs, I'm confident that we will continue to build on the successes of this past year. Together, we are taking important steps toward shaping a brighter future for parks, recreation, and conservation in Illinois. Here's to an even more successful 2025!

As I look at my calendar this year, I have to say that filling my days last year with visits to member agencies was one of the most rewarding aspects of my role in 2024. It afforded me the chance to connect with members and IPRA leaders across the state of Illinois. I was greeted by 50 locations and talked to approximately 160 agencies and members who represent them. These visits were extremely helpful in my first year, and I was truly inspired by the professionalism, expertise, and passion that each of you brings to your work. The members I met were not only impressive but also down-to-earth and welcoming, making this experience one of the highlights of my year. I'd love to make a stop at your workplace this year, so send me an email with some dates! suzi@ilipra.org



IPRA Upcoming Events

'25 Financial Sustainability Certificate Program

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 8:00 AM - Friday, May 16, 2025 12:00 PM (CDT) Bridges of Poplar Creek Country Club

The Financial Sustainability Certification Program is designed to enhance and accelerate career growth for local government employees like park, recreation, and conservation professionals. This intensive 3-day program will address complex issues including the pressing need to practice financial discipline and acknowledge the responsibility professionals have as stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Real Experiences in an Artificial World

Wednesday, May 14, 2025 (10:15 AM - 11:15 AM) or Thursday, May 15, 2025 (12:00 PM - 1:00 PM)
Webinar

In a world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence, automation, and digital interactions, the essence of genuine human connection in customer service has never been more critical. This session explores how to deliver authentic, memorable experiences in a technology-driven environment. Attendees will learn how to balance digital tools with personal touches, using Al to enhance—not replace—the human element of service.

Recreation's Role in Advancing Inclusivity for the LGBTQAI2S+Community

Wednesday, June 11, 2025 (10:15 AM - 11:15 AM) or Thursday, June 19, 2025 (12:00 PM - 1:00 PM)
Webinar

Park and recreation professionals can create inclusive environments where people are able to find a sense of belonging. Perhaps the newest frontier in the diversity, equity, and inclusion movement has been with the LGBTQAI2S+ community. This session will focus on current terminology, cultural humility, controversial issues impacting therapeutic recreation service delivery, and the role recreational therapists play in generating a welcoming environment.

Visit ILipra.org for more information.

STATEHOUSE INSIDER

ISSUES & INSIGHTS FROM THE LEGAL/LEGISLATIVE SCENE



Thousands of New Bills Introduced at the Statehouse

Jason Anselment
IAPD General Counsel

The 104th General Assembly is now underway and 6,375 new bills were introduced ahead of the filing deadline. While deliberations on all this legislation will keep lawmakers very busy, they are also bracing for a challenging budget year at the Statehouse.

IAPD is also gearing up for an active legislative session. In addition to the 460 bills we are very closely tracking, we have introduced nine different legislative initiatives as part of the 2025-26 IAPD Legislative Platform. Bill numbers and descriptions for the entire platform are listed in the brochure affixed to this page as a convenient, detachable guide.

With so many critical issues affecting park, recreation, and conservation agencies, your grassroots advocacy is as important as ever. Please make legislative advocacy a priority by joining us in Springfield on April 29-30 for Parks Day at the Capitol, the Legislative Reception, and the Legislative Conference.

Bills Impacting IAPD Member Agencies

While it is still too early in the legislative process to know which proposals will move forward this spring, below is a snapshot of bills we are closely tracking because of their impact on IAPD member agencies. As always, you can view the status of all the bills we are tracking on the IAPD website, and we will provide Legislative Updates throughout the Spring Session to keep the IAPD membership informed.

HB 61 (Blair-Sherlock, D.) would require each property tax bill to include a separate line item stating the dollar amount of a taxpayer's total tax bill that is attributable to a ballot initiative or referendum and the date on which it will expire.

HB 1021 (Cabello, J.) would prohibit park districts from arresting or issuing citations to individuals who set live traps to capture animals with the intention of rescuing those animals.

HB 1024 (Cabello, J.) would require all future property tax increases to be authorized by a referendum.

HB 1222 (Keicher, J.) would prohibit the General Assembly from approving an extension to a TIF district beyond 35 years.

HB 1496 (Halbrook, B.) would cap a reassessment increase of a property's valuation under the Property Tax Code at (i) 101% for residential property or (ii) 102% for non-residential property. These limitations would not apply if the increase in value is due to an addition, modification, or improvement to the property or if there has been a change in ownership during the previous tax year.

HB 1497 (Halbrook, B.) would freeze property taxes for all taxing districts for the levy years 2026 through 2030 unless an increase is approved by voters.

HB 2418 (Mason, J.) would create the Commission on Youth Sports for the purpose of researching, studying, and making recommendations to the Governor, General Assembly, and Department of Human Services concerning: (1) the creation of equitable, safe, and sustainable access for youth across the State to participate in sports that meet their skills and match their interests; (2) expanding integration of positive youth development in youth sports; and (3) the promotion, development, expansion, hosting, and fostering of youth sports, youth sports programs, and youth sporting events and tournaments throughout the State. The Commission would include among its members a person with experience in implementing youth sports programming in park districts.

HB 2454 (Hirschauer, M.) would expose local governments to increased liability by amending the Local Governmental and Governmental Employees Tort Immunity Act to provide that a person operating a bicycle is deemed to be an intended user of every roadway and portion of roadway on which bicyclists are permitted to ride.

HB 2499 (Reick, S.) is a reintroduction of **HB 2936** from the 103rd General Assembly and would prohibit the use of annual rollover bonds to pay back the debt service on alternate bonds that park districts sometimes use to finance larger capital improvement projects.

HB 2543 (Sosnowski, J.) would permit 5% of registered voters to place a binding referendum on the ballot to reduce a taxing district's aggregate extension by 10% from the prior year. A non-binding referendum for the same 10% reduction could be placed on the ballot by 1% of registered voters.

HB 2578 (Didech, D.) would amend the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to allow a public body to require a requester to verify orally or in writing that the requester is an individual person if the public body has a reasonable belief that a FOIA request was not submitted by an individual person. As long as the public body initiates the verification process within five business days after its receipt of a FOIA request, the deadline for the public body to respond to the request would be tolled until the requester verifies that he or she is a person, and if the requester fails to verify that he or she is a person within 30 days after the public body requests such a verification, then the public body may deny the FOIA request.

HB 2642 (McLaughlin, M.) would allow taxing districts that are subject to the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) to use the highest aggregate extension from any year in which the taxing district was subject to PTELL to calculate its limiting rate unless the aggregate extension was temporarily increased pursuant to a limiting rate or aggregate extension referendum. Currently, taxing districts can only use the highest aggregate extension in the last 3 preceding levy years.

HB 2792 (Ness, S.) would require a public body that uses an electronic system for the submission of FOIA requests to employ a CAPTCHA test or other similar measures to verify that those electronically submitted requests are being made by a human.

HB 2881 (Costa Howard, T.) / SB 2171 (Glowiak Hilton, **S.)** would expand the definition of commercial requests under FOIA to include a request for any use or purpose that furthers the commercial, trade, or profit interests of the requester or the person on whose behalf the request is made. In addition to expanding this definition. **HB 3515** (Yang Rohr. J.) would make further changes. For example. public bodies can currently charge staff time when processing commercial requests after the first 8 hours; HB 3515 would lower that number to 3 hours and would also allow public bodies to charge up to \$40 rather than \$10 per staff hour when the commercial request requires personnel to search for, retrieve, review, redact, and reproduce audio and video records. It would also exclude from the definition of "news media" internet sites, social media channels, or other sites or applications that post law enforcement videos in exchange for compensation based on the number of views.

HB 2882 (Costa Howard, T.) / SB 2142 (Glowiak Hilton, S.) would adjust the deadline for responding to FOIA requests from 5 to 15 business days and the deadline for responding to commercial FOIA requests from 21 to 30 business days.

HB 2886 (Costa Howard, T.) / SB 2166 (Glowiak Hilton, **S.)** would amend the Open Meetings Act to allow public bodies to adopt a remote attendance policy to allow board members to attend meetings remotely for any reason if a quorum is physically present.

HB 3032 (Yang Rohr, J.) would allow an advisory body to meet remotely without the physical presence of a quorum of its members provided certain conditions are met and the advisory body only supports and advises a decision-making body and does not make decisions to implement legislation or policy.

HB 3050 (Mussman, M.) would amend the Swimming Facility Act to provide that permits for construction or major alteration of a swimming facility are valid for a period of 2 years (rather than one year) from the date of issue.

SB 189 (Halpin, M.) would amend the Swimming Facility Act to require IDPH rules to permit sporting good equipment systems and fitness equipment systems to be installed in swimming facilities if the sporting good equipment system or fitness equipment system is designed for pool use and installed in accordance with the safe-use parameters specified by the manufacturer.

SB 202 (Rose, C.) would prohibit a unit of local government from holding or scheduling an official meeting on election days.

SB 1717 (Hastings, M.) would require the State Board of Elections and the various election authorities and local election officials with whom petitions for nomination are filed to: (i) create a form for a prospective candidate to request a petition for nomination; (ii) provide a prospective candidate with a petition for nomination within 24 hours after receiving a completed request form; (iii) timestamp when a completed petition for nomination is filed; and (iv) make publicly available a list of filed petitions for nomination that shall be preserved for a period of not less than 6 months.

SB 2326 (Villivalam, R.) would amend the Park District Code to require park districts to install fencing that encompasses each playground on land owned or controlled by the park district if the playground is in a high-traffic urban area.

This is just a small sample of the legislation IAPD is actively monitoring this session. Additionally, we will be advocating to ensure full funding for OSLAD and other grant programs. As a reminder, you can view the complete list of legislation and current status of the hundreds of bills we are tracking through the Advocacy section of the IAPD website (www.ILparks.org).

EDUCATION CORNER

FOSTERING INFORMATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING FOR PRACTITIONERS



Unplug Illinois: How Communities and Legislators are Championing a Device-Free Day

By Heather Weishaar Communications & Membership Director

When was the last time you left the house without your phone? Or went an hour without checking notifications?

In a world where so much of our time is spent looking at a screen, Unplug Illinois, a strategic initiative of the Illinois Park & Recreation Association, encourages people to ditch electronic devices and 'unplug'.

Created out of a state-wide goal to increase community awareness and educate communities about the value of parks and recreation, Unplug Illinois encourages 'plugging into' play, creativity, adventure, family and fun through local park and recreation agencies. Each year, on the second Saturday of July, IPRA leads Unplug Illinois Day. Communities across the state connect to enjoy outdoor activities that promote a healthy lifestyle, including fun runs, carnival games, campouts and much more.

In recent years, state legislator involvement has bolstered the initiative, with support from State Senators Don Harmon (D-39th) and Laura Fine (D-9th), and State Representative Charles Meier (R-109th). Support has come from both sides of the aisle, including State Representatives LaShawn Ford (D-8th) and State Senators Andrew Chesney (R-45th) and John Curran (R-41st).

This year, Rep. Meier sponsored a house resolution declaring Saturday, July 12, 2025, as Unplug Illinois Day in the State of Illinois. According to IPRA Executive Director Suzi Wirtz, connecting with elected officials—state and local—helps bolster the importance of unplugging and communicates the benefits to residents and the community. "Unplug Illinois gives park, recreation and conservation agencies the opportunity to generate support from elected officials that everyone can get behind," she says. "It underscores the importance of health—physical, social, emotional, mental—and the immense value that parks and recreation bring to communities."

Wirtz adds that IPRA will work with elected officials this year to create videos and social media posts to extol the benefits of unplugging. Connecting with your elected officials about Unplug Illinois is simple:

- The Transformation Kit offers information and resources and can be accessed at UnplugIllinois.org
- Schedule a call or email with your elected official and talk about the importance of unplugging. Reference the statistics in the Transformation Kit.

 At the meeting, brief the elected official and staff on Unplug Illinois, and make an ask of support. That support could range from sharing the information with constituents to participating in a local event.

The benefits are clear. Studies from the National Recreation and Park Association show that more time spent in parks and green spaces can help improve mental health issues like depression, anxiety and stress. This is especially important considering more than 1.7 million adults in the state of Illinois have a mental health condition, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Of those affected, 28% were unable to get needed counseling or therapy.

For children in particular, play and creativity are drivers for improved physical and mental well-being. According to the President's Council on Fitness, only one in three children are active daily. Unplug Illinois encourages children—and their parents or guardians—to unplug from devices and into activity instead.

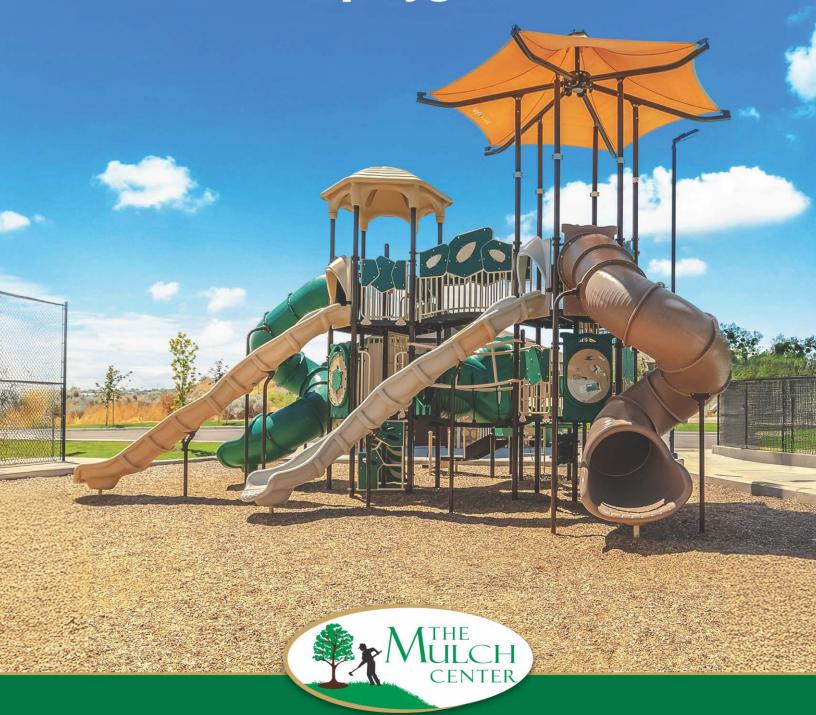
Getting involved in Unplug Illinois is simple. Whether it's an existing event (a community pool day, for example) or a new event, here are tips for creating an Unplug Illinois day in your community:

- Visit UnplugIllinois.org for the Transformation Kit with resources and event ideas.
- Engage your community by collaborating with local schools, libraries, and businesses.
- Promote unplugging with creative marketing—banners, flyers, and interactive events.
- Invite legislators to participate and support the initiative.
- · Gather feedback to enhance future events.
- Education goes beyond letting people know that parks are available for them to use—it also promotes the many advantages of parks and recreation, from economic impact to proven health benefits.

Be a part of Unplug Illinois Day on Saturday, July 12, and learn about the resources available to help educate and engage your community about the importance of parks and recreation at unplugillinois.org. And, encourage your legislators to get involved, too.

Whether you choose to ride down a bike path, go fishing in a pond or walk a trail with a friend, get outside—and leave your phone behind.

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

PAYS HUGE DIVIDENDS



OUR RESPONDENTS:

SUSIE KURUVILLA, CPA, CPRP, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GURNEE PARK DISTRICT



Susie Kuruvilla, currently serving as the executive director at the Gurnee Park District, has over 25 years of experience in a leadership role in the park and recreation field. Susie is a Certified Public Accountant (CPA), who entered the park and recreation field as a finance director and subsequently moved into the executive director role eighteen years ago. Susie currently serves on the NRPA board as treasurer. She is a board member for HR Source as well as the committee chair for PDRMA Health Benefit Committee. Susie is also an active member of the IAPD Joint Legislative Committee.

CARRIE FULLERTON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ARLINGTON HEIGHTS PARK DISTRICT



Carrie A. Fullerton has 30+ years of experience, and serves as the executive director of the Arlington Heights Park District. She also served as the executive director at the Bloomingdale Park District and Village of Hinsdale. Carrie is a Fellow of the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and served as dhairman of the board of directors for IPRA. She also served as chair of the NRPA National Revenue School, and as the president of the University of Illinois Department of RST Alumni Advisory Board. Carrie has received the "Honored Professional Award" from IAPD, the "Robert Artz Lifetime Achievement Award" and "Professional of the Year Award" from IPRA.

GREG LEWIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW LENOX COMMUNITY PARK DISTRICT



Greg S. Lewis has been a committed leader in the New Lenox Community Park District since he joined in July 1989. Serving as executive director since 2000, he has been instrumental in the district's expansion and progress. Under his guidance, the park district has obtained over \$4.5 million in OSLAD grants, enabling the construction and enhancement of numerous parks for the community's benefit. Additionally, he was key in securing \$2.5 million in PARC funding for the Lincolnway Special Recreation Association building, which has improved recreational opportunities for all. In acknowledgment of his significant contributions, Greg received the IAPD Honored Professional Award in January 2014. His dedication to parks and recreation continues to play a vital role in shaping New Lenox into a vibrant, active community.



1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR MY AGENCY TO BE INVOLVED IN GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY?

SUSIE KURUVILLA

Building and maintaining strong relationships with legislators is essential. I've learned that these relationships vary, as the connection we establish with each legislator depends on individual dynamics. With recent redistricting and new legislators joining, it can sometimes be challenging, but maintaining a positive relationship remains a top priority. When legislators think about the district, it's important that they do so with a positive impression.

These relationships are especially valuable when IAPD is working on legislation and needs support from local legislators. It's often more effective for individual agencies to reach out directly to their own legislators rather than relying solely on IAPD to communicate on their behalf. Legislators need to hear how their constituents feel about specific issues, and strong relationships help ensure that message is conveyed clearly and effectively.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

If you have a solid relationship with your legislator, they will definitely want to hear from you regarding certain pieces of legislation. Most recently the proposed bill that paid lifeguards over \$20/hour would have increased the budget of our agency by almost \$500k. Writing letters, emails and phone communications with our legislators assisted in this bill not passing. The impact of this would have had a very negative impact to our budget, and ability to continue to offer certain services.

Additionally, you may need a very particular piece of legislation for your agency and these relationships can help you make this happen. We passed a referendum at an agency I worked for, and unfortunately the public notice from the county was published a few days too early, which could have negated the entire referendum! We worked our legislators and other agencies affected to pass a very particular piece of legislation to address this issue.





GREG S. LEWIS

Legislators depend on direct communication with their constituents to grasp local needs and priorities. For the New Lenox Community Park District (NLCPD), grassroots advocacy is crucial in highlighting the vital role of park development in improving quality of life. Through ongoing engagement, NLCPD has effectively partnered with IAPD to shape important legislation and obtain necessary resources for park districts statewide. Participating in events such as Parks Day at the Capitol has played a significant role in maintaining funding for OSLAD Grants in the state budget.

2. HOW DO I GET INVOLVED IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS?

SUSIE KURUVILLA

My interest in the legislative process began early in my career in parks and recreation. Shortly after I joined the district, legislation was introduced to correct a disparity in how the Debt Service Extension base was calculated for certain park districts, including ours. My predecessor and I met with our legislators multiple times to advocate for its approval, resulting in a significant positive impact on a district's future. This experience highlighted the value of being actively involved in the legislative process early on for me.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

Staying apprised of legislative issues is key to the role of leadership staff and the Board. The legislative process is not only powerful, but also interesting. IAPD provides numerous resources including legislative alerts, breakfast events and updates to track what's happening in Springfield that may affect your agency. Early in my career as an executive director, I knew this was an area I needed to get up to speed on as quickly as possible. A colleague and I booked an appointment in Springfield with Peter Murphy and Jason Anselment who were kind enough to walk us through the process of how bills move through the system to potentially become law, and what opportunities I would have to impact this legislation along the way.

GREG S. LEWIS

Engaging in the legislative process as a park district requires a strategic approach that focuses on relationship-building and remaining informed. Monitoring news stories and legislation that could impact parks and recreation is crucial. Inviting legislators to tour your parks and participate in community events can create meaningful connections, allowing them to experience firsthand the value your district brings to the community. Keeping them informed about your district's initiatives through newsletters, updates, and invitations is also important. By maintaining active engagement, you ensure that your park district's needs and successes are included in the legislative dialogue.

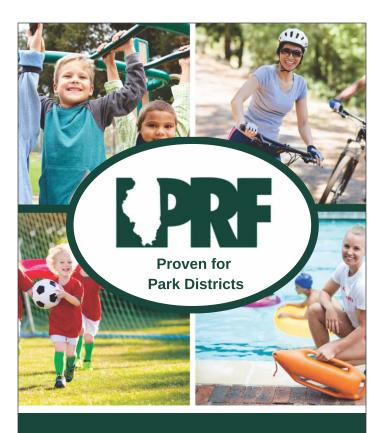
3. HOW DO I CREATE A RELATIONSHIP WITH MY LEGISLATOR?

SUSIE KURUVILLA

The relationships I have with each legislator are unique, shaped by the common interests or personal connections we share. Some connections develop naturally, while others require more effort to build. Regardless, my goal is to ensure that when they hear about me or the district, it leaves a positive impression. I am careful not to burden legislators with unrelated issues or question their stance on matters outside of park district concerns. In other words, I avoid getting involved in politics and respect each legislator for the role they serve. While I may not always agree with their positions, as long as those positions do not negatively affect the district, I remain neutral.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

Remember that legislators are people just like us. They have families, hobbies, special interests, etc. that allow you to connect with them on a different level. My relationship with each legislator is different. Some enjoy being very informed on what's happening at my agency on a regular basis, while others may prefer more infrequent communication. Communication preferences are important to understand – email, phone, text, letters...find out how your legislator prefers to communicate. Some would like you to reach out to them directly, while others prefer that you go through their staff. Each brochure season we send our legislators a folder with the news program guide and passes to some of our facilities and events, to keep them in the loop.



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Relationships with a legislators should not only involve what you need from them, but also what you can do for them. Legislators look for valuable opportunities to connect with their constituents in their jurisdiction such as park/facility ribbon-cutting events, agency special events, etc. Invite your legislators and their staff to your events. Let them know if there will be an opportunity to address the crowd and/or if you've invited the press.

GREG S. LEWIS

Creating a strong and effective relationship with legislators requires intentional engagement. Clear communication and ongoing collaboration are essential when engaging with your legislator. Begin by researching their personal and professional interests, legislative priorities, and past involvement with community issues. This understanding will enable you to tailor your approach effectively. Additionally, identify their preferred communication methods, whether they favor email, phone calls, or inperson meetings.

Initiate contact by introducing your park district through a formal letter or email that highlights your role within the community. Request a face-to-face meeting to discuss your district's initiatives and their impact on the community. Extending invitations to park district events, such as ribbon cuttings, community festivals, or groundbreaking ceremonies, can further strengthen your relationship.

4. HOW DO I APPROACH LEGISLATORS WITH ISSUES?

SUSIE KURUVILLA

I ensure that my interactions with legislators focus more on positive engagement than on presenting issues. By fostering positive connections throughout the year, it becomes easier to address concerns when they arise. One way we support our legislators is by offering them opportunities to connect with their constituents through invitations to various events. I've known two of our legislators for some time, and we frequently communicate through text messages or phone calls. For the others, communication primarily takes place through emails and occasional in-person visits.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

This relationship should be a two-way street. A legislator may call you for guidance on a particular bill, and may even call you from the floor of the House or Senate. Always take their call if you can, you never know if time is of the essence on their issue.



GREG S. LEWIS

Engaging with legislators on important issues requires a strategic and thoughtful approach. To effectively convey requests or concerns, a park district should start by thoroughly understanding the issue at hand. This involves gathering relevant facts, data, and community feedback to fully grasp the potential legislative impacts. Anticipating questions and counterarguments from legislators will also prepare you for a productive discussion.

Clear and concise communication is essential. Schedule a formal meeting with the legislator or their staff to discuss your concerns. Present the issue succinctly, articulating its significance and impact on the community. Using visuals or handouts can enhance your message. Additionally, propose actionable solutions, such as supporting a specific bill or advocating for funding.

Establishing a collaborative partnership with the legislator is vital. Show your park district's commitment to working together on shared goals and offer valuable resources, such as data or expert insights, to assist them in decision-making.

5. WHAT DO I DO TO CULTIVATE THE **RELATIONSHIP ONCE IT IS ESTABLISHED?**

SUSIE KURUVILLA

The district actively engages with legislators by inviting them to various events and maintaining regular communication without being overbearing. We make it a point to visit them in Springfield at least once a year during the Legislative Conference. Additionally, we frequently attend IAPD Legislative Breakfasts and have even hosted a few ourselves. When we first launched our walking program, "GO Gurnee," the administrative team personally visited each legislator to extend an invitation to the launch and request their support. Every legislator attended the event and showed tremendous enthusiasm for our initiative.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

Don't just contact legislators when you want something. Send PR to the district, extend invitations to park district events and activities, share the spotlight, highlight them in your publications and send them a copy

GREG S. LEWIS

Maintaining consistent communication with legislators is crucial for fostering strong relationships and ensuring support for park district initiatives. Regular updates through newsletters, project updates, and event invitations keep legislators informed about ongoing activities. Engaging with advocacy groups, such as the Illinois Association of Park Districts, enhances these efforts and provides a platform for collective action. Collaboration on community goals is essential. It's important to present district initiatives in ways that align with the legislator's priorities, whether that be environmental conservation, vouth development, or public health. Offering assistance through testimonials or relevant data can further strengthen this partnership.

A prime example of the positive outcomes of such collaboration is the renovation of The Sanctuary Golf Course. The expansion of the grass driving range, short game and putting green practice area, along with the new heated 20-bay TopTracer Driving Range indoor facility, not only emphasizes the economic benefits that legislators can advocate for but also demonstrates the positive impact on the community.

Celebrating the support of legislators helps to reinforce these relationships. Publicly recognizing their contributions at events or through various publications showcases their importance to the park district's success. Sharing their involvement in newsletters, social media, or press releases ensures that their efforts are highlighted. Building a long-term relationship requires consistency in engagement. It's beneficial to reach out to legislators regularly, not solely when assistance is needed. Fostering mutual benefits by advocating for their goals when appropriate can establish a reciprocal partnership. Cultivating trust through transparency and open communication lays a solid foundation for ongoing collaboration.



OUR SUCCESS WITH OSLAD GRANTS
IS A TESTAMENT TO THE STRONG,
COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS
WE'VE BUILT WITH OUR LEGISLATORS.
THEY'VE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN
HELPING US CREATE SPACES THAT
TRULY ENRICH THE LIVES OF OUR
RESIDENTS.

6. OUTCOMES

SUSIE KURUVILLA

Last year, I reached out to Senator Adriane Johnson and Representative Joyce Mason to seek their support for our capital projects. Both of them submitted line-item grant requests, resulting in \$950,000 in funding for the district from the State of Illinois. I've intentionally refrained from seeking financial assistance from them on a regular basis, which made their contribution even more generous.

CARRIE A. FULLERTON

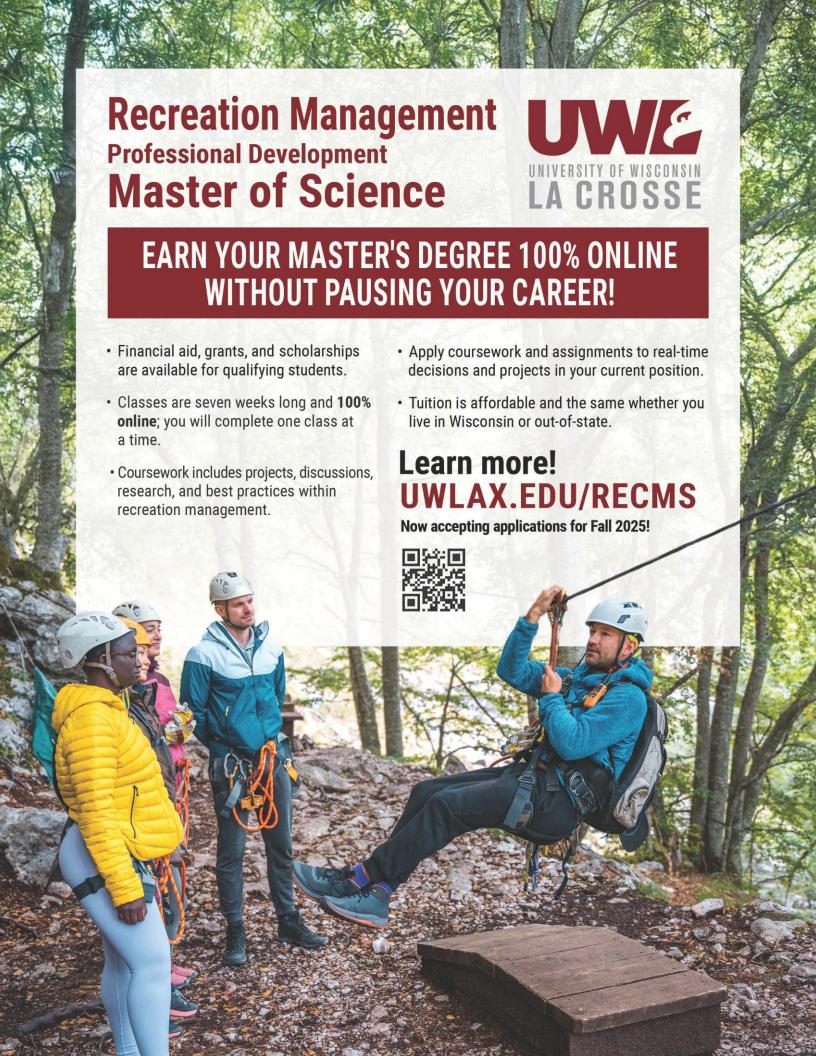
A direct, positive outcome our agency experienced as a result of our relationships with our legislators is the many inclusions we've had in capital bill resources realizing hundreds of thousands of dollars in much-needed capital money. The best way to access this is to meet annually with your legislators to share a catalog of your capital needs (with photos) and cost estimates. Many times a particular project will resonate with a legislator and they will ensure your inclusion in upcoming capital bills. Having this catalog ready, and regularly editing it to keep it current is a sure fire way to be prepared for any meeting opportunities that come your way.

GREG S. LEWIS

The benefits of NLCPD's strong legislative relationships are evident in the success of key projects funded by OSLAD grants within the last few years:

- **Sky Harbor:** Legislators championed funding for this project, recognizing its community value.
- **Hibernia Park Phase 2:** Collaboration with legislators enabled significant enhancements, offering expanded recreational opportunities.
- Water Chase Park: Legislative support was pivotal in securing funding, and transforming a community vision into reality.
- Sharon's Bay Renovation: Legislators understood the importance of inclusive, updated facilities, leading to successful grant approval.

Our success with OSLAD grants is a testament to the strong, collaborative relationships we've built with our legislators. They've been instrumental in helping us create spaces that truly enrich the lives of our residents.





HOW TO BUILD A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR

Legislator

By Carol Sente

Vernon Hills Park District Commissioner and former Illinois State Representative for District 59

Reaching out to your Illinois or U.S. senator, congressperson or state representative can feel a bit intimidating. After all, you aren't the only person contacting them and where do you start? The process takes effort and time but is well worth it. These are the three main elements to developing effective relationships:

- The benefit of building a healthy relationship
- Which legislators to focus your time on
- Ideas and activities to encourage a good relationship

Let's start with the reality that a single legislator covers a significant geography and has a great many constituents. For example, a state representative's district covers approximately 108,734 constituents and it only grows from there to 213,347 for an Illinois senator to 750,000 constituents for your congressperson and Illinois' entire population of 12.5 million people for our two U.S. senators.

Most people think one of two thoughts regarding contacting their legislator, "I don't want to bother them" or "What can my legislator help me with?" The reality is your legislator WANTS you to call, text and email them. They want to have a relationship with you, and since relatively few individuals do so, that should provide extra encouragement for you to start building a great relationship with your legislator today.

• • •



Interacting with legislators is not dissimilar from any other networking activity or relationship building endeavor; you will get out of it what you put into it. The relationship will not grow effectively without regular, earnest effort.

Why Should I Put the Effort Into Building a Relationship with my Legislator?

You have plenty of responsibilities on your plate, so let's first discuss why building the relationship is worth your time. To get right to the heart of it, your state and U.S. legislators not only vote to support issues that could benefit you, but they can also vote against legislation that could hurt your park agency if you take the time to educate them about your concerns. And if that isn't enough to get you interested, they have access to funds that can be distributed to your agency, and capable staff to call when you need assistance with a state or federal matter rather than you trying to navigate an inquiry on your own and potentially waiting days or weeks for a reply.

Who Exactly Should I Building a Relationship With?

It makes the most sense to build the strongest relationship with legislators that cover part or all the boundaries of your park agency. The reason being is that the legislator's first priority is representing their constituents. As a Vernon Hills Park District commissioner, that means our board and staff focus on building a relationship with State Representative Dan Didech, and State Senator Adriane Johnson, who cover the largest majority of our agency, and U.S. Congressperson Brad Schneider and U.S. Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth who cover all our agency's boundaries.

Note, many park agencies can be represented by more than one state legislator or congressperson because your boundaries are not identical. The point being, get to know any and all legislators that cover even a small portion of your agency's boundaries. The more individuals thinking about you and your agency in Springfield or D.C., the better. And, of course, do not forget your county and local elected officials at your village/city, school districts, library, fire protection district, etc.

Often, we focus most of our attention on the elected official themselves. Be sure to spend just as much time building a relationship with their staff; they are the gatekeepers and huge sources of valuable information. You may also want to spend time getting to know legislators who chair committees where bills may be heard that affect our industry like energy & environment, state government, and personnel & pensions, just to name a few.

How Can I Effectively Build a Relationship with My Legislators?

The rest of the article will cover several ideas for how to build a mutually beneficial relationship with your legislator, but get creative, this is by no means an exhaustive list. Each legislator is an individual with their own style and preferences, so ask them how they would like to interact with you? If you haven't done so already, a great way to start is to contact their office to set up a convenient time to meet with them at one of your facilities, or for a meal. Exchange contact information and encourage the legislator to call you anytime they have a question about park agencies or need a space or park to hold one of their events.

Wanting to cover a variety of helpful topics, I reached out to our legislators and a few former peers to get some additional insight into this topic. Representative Daniel Didech's initial comment was "realize we are people just like you and we want to know you." Senator Julie Morrison echoed "know your legislator on a first name basis, have their cell phone, and talk to them regularly." Senator Adriane Johnson encouraged that you "invite legislators to all your events and get on their e-news list. Drive down to Springfield for the Inauguration Ceremony and for Parks Day at the Capitol." Representative Anna Moeller added "get on our Citizen Advisory Committees back in the district." Most legislators have Coffee Shop gatherings, and constituent committees to gather information about what is important to you so they can better represent your needs in Springfield.

Recently retired Executive Director Jeff Fougerousse started a Quarterly Public Officials Meeting where our U.S., state, county and township elected representatives are invited to meet with local governmental agencies to discuss mutual issues, brainstorm and share relevant news about each agency. This is a great way to establish regular contact in one meeting with multiple agencies and maximize a legislator's time. This format has been so successful, that other local governmental bodies in our area are replicating this idea in their vicinity. Representative Ann Williams encourages people to "become the expert or go-to person on a topic you care about, because that means more frequent and personal interactions with the legislator". She also shared to "provide positive feedback and thanks when they or their office offer support." If your name is familiar to the legislator and staff, that's a great start in building a strong relationship.

You may be wondering who should be establishing the relationship with the legislator? Each park commissioner should take time to initiate a healthy and friendly relationship with your legislators as well as the executive director. Your commissioners share the bond of being a fellow elected official, understanding the challenges of representing constituents, running for office, voting for taxes or not, etc. Like all relationships, some of your commissioners may bond more easily with a particular legislator and have more in common but that doesn't mean any commissioner gets a pass.

Since many commissioners have careers and other priorities, the executive director will also want to build a relationship with the agency's legislators and be a point person. For example, the executive director could be the individual coordinating a legislator visit to a park to discuss a situation requiring assistance with a state agency or the

one inviting the legislator to a highly attended agency event. Vernon Hills Park District's Executive Director Matt LaPorte offered to host the annual Legislative Breakfast for Lake County at our Sullivan Community Center, a great way to highlight our facility and bring various legislators to our location.

A few less common ideas for reaching out to your legislator include inviting them to participate in comprehensive planning or strategic planning focus group discussions that your agency is having to get their opinion as well as introduce them to their constituents in a more low-key manner. Do you have unused space in one of your facilities? The Vernon Hills Park District offered my former legislative aide and I office space to rent at their administration building. Legislators receive relatively small budgets to run their state offices, so saving funds on lower rent that we could in turn direct to an additional part-time aide who could provide more benefit to constituents is a win for the legislator. The park agency in turn benefits by having convenient access to that legislator and someone who will likely remember the gesture when you have a request. Most importantly, take time to talk to your legislator at times other than when you need them. Build the relationship in general and make deposits into that relationship long before you need something. Take the time to learn about them, their family, background, and interests. Lastly, if you asked for something and the legislator couldn't make it happen, recognize they aren't your personal genie; don't complain, rather continue to build the relationship and ask again for something else.

A great many legislators grew up playing in Illinois parks, enrolling in agency programs and swimming at your pools. Build on the natural love that legislators have for our industry and think about one new action you can take today to strengthen your relationship with your legislators.



Carol Sente has over 35 years of diverse experience consulting to Illinois park agencies and eight years serving as a commissioner, and currently vice president, at the Vernon Hills Park District. She is the founder and principal of Carol Sente Consulting LLC, a boutique consulting firm offering strategic planning, leadership coaching and board development workshops to the field of parks and recreation. Carol served in the Illinois

General Assembly as state representative for District 59 from 2009-2019 and as managing partner of SRBL Architects, Deerfield, IL which specialized in park agency design. Carol holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from Indiana University's Kelley School of Business.



CONFERENCE AWARDS

IAPD

The Illinois Association of Park Districts recognized the inspiring leaders of Illinois parks, recreation, and conservation at the 2025 Soaring to New Heights Conference. Congratulations to all of our individual and agency winners, and thank you for continuing to show the rest of the nation how incredible our park districts, forest preserves, conservation districts, recreation, and special recreation agencies are in Illinois!

COMMISSIONER OF THE YEAR



Presented posthumously to **Mike Reid**, Skokie Park District. Accepting on his behalf were **Becky Heiber** and **Josh**, **Diana**, and **Brad Reid**.

RISING STAR



Frank Saverino, Jr., Bloomingdale Park District

MIKE CASSIDY COMMISSIONER COMMUNITY SERVICE



Leslie Sgro, Springfield Park District

HONORED PROFESSIONAL



Jay Lerner, Waukegan Park District

IAPD OUTSTANDING LEGISLATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD



Senator Julie Morrison



Representative Brad Stephens



Representative Bob Rita

IAPD/IPRA JOINT AWARD Champions for Change



Homewood-Flossmoor Park District

Congratulations to the following commissioners recognized for their outstanding achievements in advancing to a new level in IAPD's **BOARD MEMBER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**:

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Frank J. Saverino, Bloomingdale Park District
Melissa Victor, Cary Park District
Carolyn Ubriaco, Elmhurst Park District
David S. Tosh, Glenview Park District
Jean Ott, Medinah Park District
Leslie Ruffing, Naperville Park District
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Jake Worley-Hood, Park District of Oak Park
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IPRA

Congratulations to the following individuals & agencies that were recognized for their outstanding achievements at the 2025 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference.



All Conference Awards Luncheon Winners

YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



Taylor Krawcyzk, St. Charles Park District

PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR



Jim Rogers, Elmhurst Park District

EXCEPTIONAL WORKPLACE AWARDS

Fox Valley Special Recreation Association (FVSRA) Geneseo Park District Oswegoland Park District

Vernon Hills Park District

Park District of Highland Park

COMMUNITY IMPACT



Quincy Bejster, Waukegan Park District

ROBERT ARTZ LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Michael Benard, Wheaton Park District

DISTINGUISHED PARK AND RECREATION ACCREDITED AGENCIES 2025-2030

Cary Park District
Geneseo Park District
Glencoe Park District
Glenview Park District
Huntley Park District
Waukegan Park District
Worth Park District



AGENCY SHOWCASE AWARDS

Overall

1st Place: Park District of Highland Park

2nd Place: Roselle Park

District

3rd Place: Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Peoples Choice

Park District of Highland Park

Category Honors

Brochure Print: Lake County Forest Preserve District

Brochure Virtual:

Winnetka Park District

Integrated

Photography: Romeoville

Park District

Large Format

Marketing: Glencoe Park

District

Logo Design: Northbrook

Park District

Marketing Campaign:

Elmhurst Park District

Print Communication – Informational: Dundee

Township Park District

Print Communication – Promotional: Oak Lawn

Park District

Social Media

Campaign: Forest Preserve District of

DuPage County

Tabletop Display:

Plainfield Park District

Videography - Long

Form: Forest Preserve District of DuPage

County

Videography - Short

Form: Hoffman Estates

Park District

Website: Forest Preserve

District of DuPage

County

Written Content: Fox

Valley Park District



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28 Illinois Parks & Recreation

OUTSTANDING AWARDS

Park Division I:

Burr Ridge Park District -Harvester Park - Homestead Hill and Route 66 Playgrounds

Park Division II:

Plainfield Park District Van Horn Woods

Facility Division I:

Freeport Park District Wing It! Mini Golf

Facility Division II:

Naperville Park District Rothermel Family Skate Facility

Program Division II:

Waukegan Park District Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration

Special Event Division I:

Yorkville Parks & Recreation Department School's Out Beach Party

Special Event Division II:

Northbrook Park District Paint the Prairie

SECTION DISTINGUISHED AWARDS

Administration & Finance:

Maureen Nugent, Plainfield District

Communications & Marketing:

Kristina Nemetz, Village of Montgomery

Diversity:

Haley Colucci, Oak Brook Park District

Facility Management:

Ryan Kertson, Fox Valley Park District

Forest Preserve & Conservation:

Katie Schweiger, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Parks & Natural Resources:

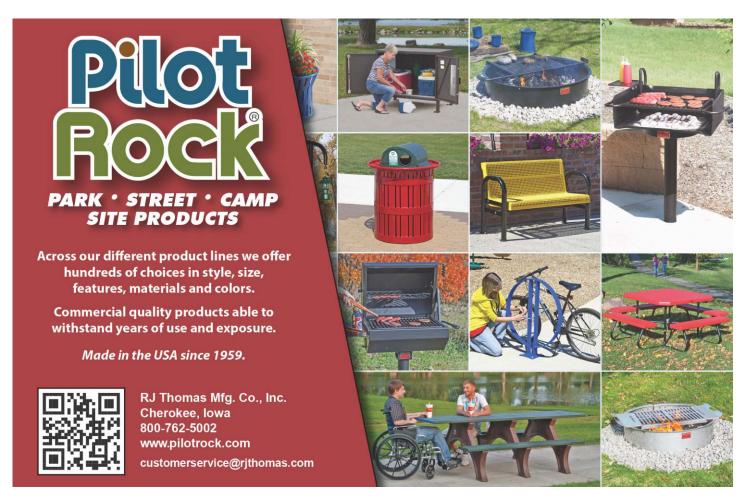
Bob Johnson, Oak Brook Park District

Recreation:

Jess Day, Village of South Elgin

Therapeutic Recreation:

Andrea Griffin, NWSRA



2025

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The 2024 IP&R Magazine Photo Contest Awards

Congratulations to all our 2024 Give Us Your Best Shot Photo Contest Winners!

The Give Us Your Best Shot photo contest winners were announced at the Soaring to New Heights Conference.



SPORTS

1st Place

Marybeth Stone
Northbrook Park District
"Flying Down the Field"

2nd Place JP McNamara Wilmette Park District "Red Light! Freeze!

3rd Place
Kate Erickson
Winnetka Park District
"Tug of War"

Honorable Mention

Matt Jakubowski
Park District of Franklin Park
"Gliding with Grace"

Tachel Brown
Champaign Park District
"Elementary Basketball

Rick Bamman
Batavia Park District
"Waiting to Play"





WILDLIFE

1st Place

Byron Hurley Springfield Park District "Wood Duck"

2nd Place

Larry Kmiecik Wheaton Park District
"Sandhill Crane"

3rd Place

Kevin Wright
Canton Park District
"Turtle"

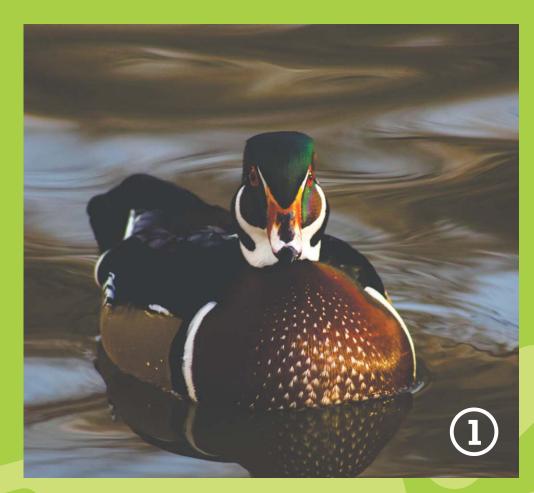
Honorable Mention

Laura Sprague Geneva Park District "Pollinator"

Ray Poczkalski McHenry Count Conservation District "Orchard Oriole"

Justin Waters

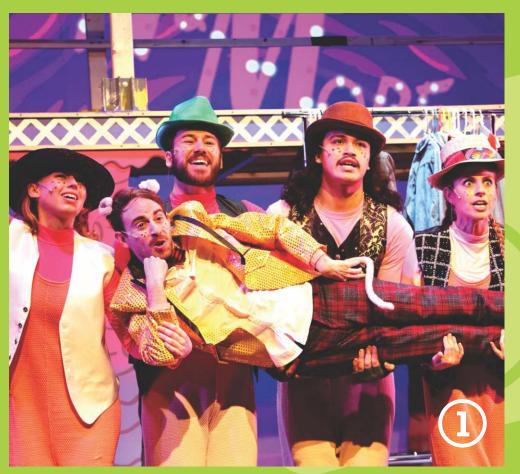
Oak Lawn Park District "Sup"











RECREATION/ PEOPLE AT PLAY

1st Place

Sally Norlie Northbrook Park District "Naked Mole Rat Fashion"

2nd Place

Karly Sinise
Glen Ellyn Park District
"Sunset Pool Opening
Weekend"

3rd Place -

Geneva Slupski
Rolling Meadows Park District
"A New Friend"

Honorable Mention

Lauren Raspanti Lemont Park District "Sunset Soiree"

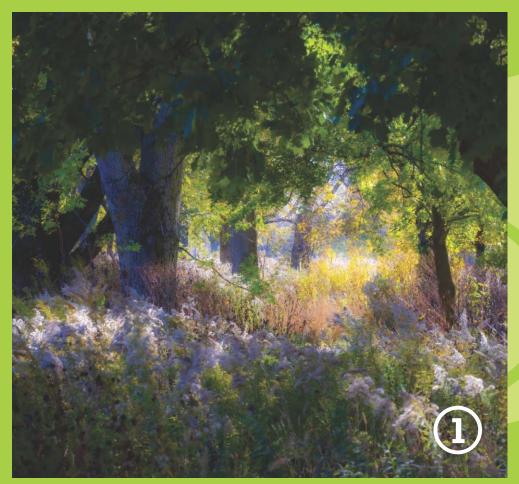
Allison Janis Oswegoland Park District "Friends at Play"

Skylar Greenberg Winnetka Park District "Egg Collection"









NATURE/ **LANDSCAPES**

1st Place

Jeff Cohen

Park District of Highland Park

"Impressionistic Beauty"

2nd Place

Julia Meade

Wheaton Park District

"Northside Park Winter

Flurries"

3rd Place -

Amanda Pawelko

McHenry County Conservation District "Gloomy"

Honorable Mention

Irene Flebbe

Forest Preserves of Cook County
"Foggy Morning"

Angela Williams Plainfield Park District "Frost"

Brian Romes
Park District of Highland Park
"Beautiful Horizon"











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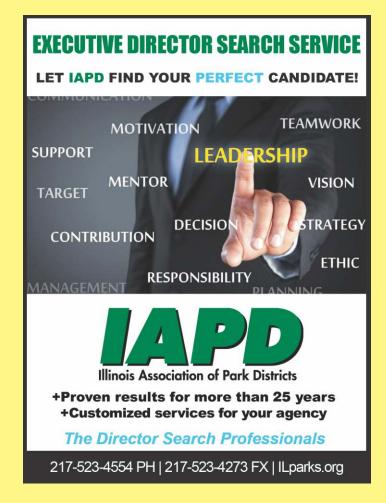








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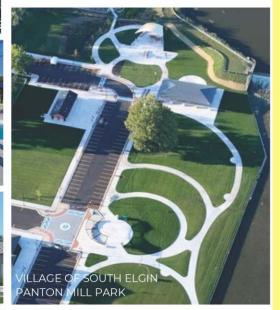






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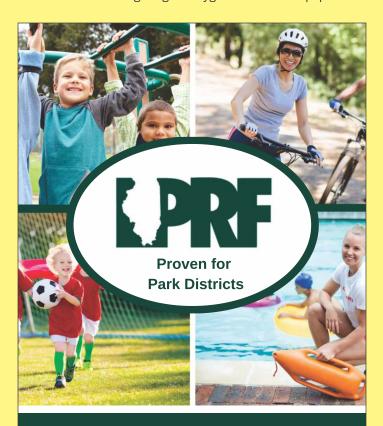


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PEOPLE & PLACES



Gurnee Park District Announces New **Executive Director** Gurnee Park District is pleased to announce the appointment of Michael "Mike" Szpylman as its new executive director. effective May 1, 2025. Mike will succeed Susie Kuruvilla, who will be retiring after 27 years of

service with Gurnee Park District on April 30, 2025. Mike has been an integral part of the Gurnee Park District since October 2010, serving as the director of business services and treasurer. His leadership in developing long-term financial strategies has supported critical capital improvement projects and helped the district achieve recognition through GFOA awards for financial reporting and budget presentation. Beyond financial management, Mike has played a pivotal role in many of the district's most significant projects, including the acquisition and operational planning of FitNation as well as being the co-lead on the development and implementation of the current Comprehensive Strategic Master Plan. With over 20 years of leadership, financial management, and strategic planning experience, Mike brings a wealth of expertise to the executive director position. Prior to joining the Gurnee Park District, he held key financial leadership roles, including finance director/treasurer for the Village of Kronenwetter, WI, and vice president of finance and administration at Topgolf USA.



Kuruvilla to Retire as Gurnee **Park District Executive** Director

The Gurnee Park District announces the retirement of Executive Director Susie Kuruvilla, effective April 30, 2025. Susie has been a cornerstone of the district since joining as director of business services in June 1997. Over her 27-year tenure, including 18 vears as executive director. Susie's commitment and leadership have left a significant mark on the district and

the Gurnee community.

With Susie at the helm, and the incredible teamwork of the board and staff, Gurnee Park District has become a vibrant center of activity and community spirit. From the Hunt Club Park Aquatic Center to the Hunt Club Park Community Center, the transformation of Gold's Gym into FitNation, and the beautiful parks and playgrounds throughout the district, Susie's leadership has provided us with spaces where fun and fitness thrive. In 2010, under Susie's leadership, the district received the National Gold Medal Award for excellence, showcasing the district's commitment to serving the community at a high standard.

Beyond Gurnee Park District, Susie has been a dedicated advocate and leader in the field of parks and recreation. She served on several boards and committees, including as Treasurer of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), judge for the National Gold Medal Award, chair of the Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) Health Benefit Committee, member of the Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD) Joint Legislative Committee, board member for Warren Special Recreation Association (WSRA), and board member for HR Source.



Sandy Vangundy retires

After over three decades of dedicated service to the Bloomingdale Park District, Sandy Vangundy retired last October, leaving behind a legacy of community impact. Sandy began as a recreation supervisor and later became director of recreation, creating programs and partnerships that enriched the lives of residents. Notably, she co-founded the Festival of Lights, attracting over 3,000 participants annually, and developed the Super Pass partnership with Roselle Park District.

Sandy's leadership extended beyond the park district, contributing to the Character Counts! board and securing grants for projects like the Story Walk. She was instrumental in opening the Oasis Water Park, seeing a record 42,874 visitors in its first season, and was key in launching the BOOmingdale Halloween event and the Paint the Parks project. In honor of her service, Buddy Benches will be placed at Circle Park, Erickson Elementary School and DuJardin Elementary School.

PEOPLE & PLACES



Freeport Park
District Board of
Commissioners
Appoints Bruce
Cubberley as
Executive Director
The Freeport Park District
has appointed Bruce
Cubberley to the position of
executive director.

Effective October 16, 2024, Bruce Cubberley is the new executive director of the Freeport Park District. Cubberley earned a bachelor of science in Ornamental Horticulture at Purdue University and a master of science in Landscape Horticulture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For the last 5 years, Cubberley has been the superintendent of parks and natural resources at the park district.

This is an exciting time for the park district with improvement projects and challenges on the horizon including completion of a new multiuse path along the south bank of the Yellow Creek in Krape Park and other pending grant projects.



Freeport Park District
Names Berin Jackson as
Superintendent of Parks
and Natural Resources
The Freeport Park District
announced that Berin Jackson will
transition into the role of
superintendent of parks and
natural resources effective
February 3, 2025. His experience
in park management, dedication
to community engagement, and
passion for environmental

stewardship make him the perfect leader to enhance and expand the parks system.

Berin was previously superintendent of recreation at the Freeport Park District. He has a bachelors degree in recreation tourism park administration from Western University.

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