

illinois

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PARKS AND RECREATION

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



summer  
programming  
& education





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# IN THIS ISSUE



- 4 **From the Editor**  
Leading Through Adapting and Accessibility
- 6 **Get on Board**  
Timely Advice for Park Board Presidents and Those Aspiring to the Role
- 8 **Eye on the Profession**  
Partnering on Professional Development: A Not-So-New Strategic Approach to Growth
- 10 **Statehouse Insider**  
Lawmakers Conclude Challenging Spring Session
- 12 **Education Corner**  
Lifelong Learning in the Online Era: IPRA University
- 14 **Meeting the Moment — How Our Park District Builds a Better Summer for All**
- 18 **Using Educational Partnerships to Improve Business Performance**
- 22 **Summer in Streamwood: It's a Community Thing**
- 26 **The Balance of Performance and Safety**
- 29 **People and Places**  
Updates and tributes in the park, recreation and conservation family
- 31 **IAPD Corporate Members**
- 35 **IPRA Commercial Members**

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Get Outside!

During Parks Day at the Capitol, I walked through the rotunda of the Illinois State Capitol and talked with many of the attending agencies, and one of my takeaways is that it's easy to see that summer always brings with it a sense of excitement for parks and recreation.



As the summer months start to bring more sunshine, so many of our park districts, conservation districts, forest preserves, recreation, and special recreation agencies know how to bring the fun while also providing beneficial outlets for residents.

From swim lessons to summer sports, to just providing a place for children to be active and productive while school is not in session, your agency plays a pivotal role in offering safe spaces for the younger population.

Summer events also bring a sense of community by bringing out everyone to participate. Think of the joy you felt going to a local park to celebrate the Fourth of July, or listened to live music at a festival, or just spent some time at your favorite park exploring and relaxing.

Our articles in this issue look at summer programming and education, and I know you'll enjoy learning about how some of your peers have found new and exciting ways to make the warmer months some of the best of the year!

Thanks for reading!

— Wayne Utterback, Editor

*Cover photo by Danielle Strohmer from the Downers Grove Park District as part of the 2024 Give Us Your Best Shot Photo Contest.*



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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

# TIMELY ADVICE FOR PARK BOARD PRESIDENTS AND THOSE ASPIRING TO THE ROLE

The IAPD has just finished a highly successful commissioner Boot Camp program with regional locations throughout the state. It culminated with an online Boot Camp which was recorded for use by anyone that missed it or the in-person experience. More than 200 newly elected commissioners took their one-time OMA training and received their certificates.

The IAPD sponsored the Financial Sustainability Workshop, which was also highly successful for the third year in a row, and we have now added an advanced Part 2 for the series.

The topic of this article revolves around the power, duties, and responsibilities of a park board president. While you might not currently be in that role, it is likely you will be in the future and consequently, I commend its principles and concepts to all board members.

Being selected by your board to be its president is an honor and a privilege that reflects the confidence your board has in your abilities as a leader. The fundamental question that a board president should ask is, "What does it take for me to be an effective and successful board president?"

You don't need to have the best understanding of Robert's Rules of Order and parliamentary procedures, and you don't have to be a board member with the longest tenure in order to be successful. The most effective board presidents realize that being selected as board president is not a knighting, but rather the acceptance of responsibility to ensure that your board and board meetings are run as efficiently as possible and focus on moving your park district forward into the future.

*The Park District Code* has a very short paragraph at the end of Article 4 in Section 4-9 on the duties of the president and provides that "the president of any park district shall preside at all meetings of the board and shall

call special meetings thereof of his own motion, or on the request of two or more members and, in the case of a special meeting, shall cause a notice to be given to all members as provided by the rule of said board. He or she shall also have the right to vote upon all questions coming before the board and shall be a member thereof."

Those legal responsibilities outlined in state statute are really just the beginning of your role and responsibility as a board president. Successful board presidents recognize that they must act as the leader of the governance team, as a steward of the park district's resources, and as a facilitator in the park district's efforts to meet its strategic goals and fulfill its mission.

As board president, it is imperative that you set aside any personal agendas in favor of the bigger picture that aligns all the interests of the park district. Consider these rules, and keep the following points in mind, to help you succeed as board president.

- **Be prepared.** You will always feel more comfortable going into a board meeting if you are fully aware of what is expected of you, and it is important that you communicate at a high level with the park district CEO so that you are prepared for each and every board meeting.
- **Understand the difference between governance and management.** It is important that you do not become a conduit for employees to bypass the park district director. This will only cause discord and undermine the authority of management.
- **Don't supervise.** As board president, you should resist the urge to supervise either the CEO or the park district staff. While you should communicate frequently with the director on issues facing the district, your role should be primarily focused on building board consensus and directing the agency



toward the accomplishment of its strategic plan. A board president stands in the same position as other board members when it comes to the principle of the chain of command.

- **Run great meetings.** As board president, your service will be greatly appreciated by your fellow board members if you concentrate on running a focused and well-planned board meeting. It is difficult to run an effective meeting if you are not mindful of some of the following points.
- **Plan ahead.** Make sure the agenda is carefully planned with the park district chief executive regarding the key issues that the board should address. It is important that you are committed to shifting discussion away from everyday minutia to ensure that the board has ample time to devote itself to the important topics that need to be addressed.
- **Encourage participation.** Be sure to engage the entire board. It is important to avoid letting a few people dominate the discussion, and you should encourage everybody to contribute – calling on members individually, if necessary, to ensure that all voices are heard.
- **Start and finish on time.** The best meetings that I have ever attended are those that start on time, keep to a schedule and finish strong. It's important to respect those who arrive on time by beginning promptly. Board members who arrive late and disrupt a meeting already in progress will be motivated to arrive on time in the future if they know that the meeting will not wait for individuals.

It's important, also, to keep the focus on the business at hand. Sometimes, it's helpful to incorporate time frames into the written agenda. In this way, you'll indicate to the board the topics that are most necessary to discuss.

- **End on a positive note.** At the close of the meeting, prior to adjournment, I think it's a good practice for the board president to provide a wrap-up or a summary of the positives that occurred so that everyone can leave feeling that their time was well spent and that the board made progress.

“Leadership is  
the art of giving  
people a  
platform for  
spreading ideas  
that work.”

~Seth Godin

- **Use a consent agenda.** Many boards also use a consent agenda. This agenda removes reports of past activities from general discussion. Items that typically fall into this category are meeting minutes, committee reports, paid bills and updates on projects that do not require current action. Consent agenda items are typically included as one of the first items of business. They require a motion, a second and a vote to approve, but no discussion. Batching these housekeeping reports together can easily save the board time in the agenda to discuss the district's most important issues.
- **Conduct meeting evaluations.** Smart meeting management also means that you periodically get feedback from fellow board members on how productive they perceive the meetings to be and get suggestions from them for fine-tuning. This kind of post-meeting analysis should not be done at the end of every meeting, but often enough to ensure that you are on track.  
  
Remember that any amount of meeting time you free from low priority business can be focused on your park district's strategic needs. With so many issues facing park districts these days, it is important to keep an eye on the big picture.
- **Encourage board commitment to improvement.** Under your leadership, it's important to commit your board to improvement. The entire board should be dedicated to improving its performance. It would also be a demonstration of good leadership for you to work with the park district director to create and encourage opportunities for participation in ongoing education so that board members can stay up-to-date on changing and emerging issues.
- **Self-evaluation.** Finally, it is key to great leadership to make sure that board members take part in a self-assessment on an annual basis so that issues that may be cropping up, whether they are based on communication or the personal style of individual board members, can be addressed.



## EYE ON THE **PROFESSION**

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

By Suzi Wirtz, IOM, IPRA Executive Director

# PARTNERING ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A Not-So-New Strategic Approach to Growth

One of IPRA's strategic themes within the current overall plan is "Learning and Growth," and stemming from that is an objective to "foster a risk tolerant environment" to ultimately assist the staff in serving members. One deliberate way we achieve that is by partnering with companies and individuals who can help to increase and optimize the IPRA learning opportunities.

Interestingly, just this week as I was cleaning out some IPRA files, I came across a document from 1993 entitled, "Vision for 2003," so essentially a 10-year plan. One of the top priorities in IPRA's vision at that time was to "be leaders in the public sector movement toward partnerships and strategic alliances that help achieve our full potential." So, the more things change, the more they stay the same! (Sidenote: other priorities over 20 years ago were *still* health/wellness, environmental issues, inclusive programming and facilities.)

Collaborations with industry experts, educational institutions, commercial members, sponsors and other providers enable us to expand member offerings, stay relevant and deliver highly impactful and meaningful professional development programs.

### **Why Professional Development Matters**

Professional development is critical for IPRA's individual members. With it, you can advance your careers, maintain certifications and adapt to ever-evolving trends in the field of parks, recreation and conservation. At the end of the day, this ongoing commitment to learning benefits not just the individual, but the entire community you have committed yourself to serve. On the softer side, fostering innovation and continuous improvement builds staff morale and the likelihood of retaining staff for many, many years.

However, associations (like IPRA) can sometimes face resource constraints, including limited staff, budget pressures and challenges in keeping content up-to-date. Strategically partnering with outside organizations and experts have helped us to overcome these barriers. Here's a few reasons why:

#### **1. Access to Subject Matter Experts**

Yes, IPRA members are the real, true experts in the park, recreation and conservation field. That is why we have so many opportunities to volunteer and provide that subject matter expertise on sections, committees, boards and other groups. By also looking to universities, consultants, training firms or industry thought leaders, we are able to offer authoritative content that resonates with members. These insights include cutting-edge perspectives, industry benchmarks and practical frameworks.

#### **2. Innovative Learning Technology**

As you have heard in various IPRA publications and announcements, and can read more about in the Education Corner in this issue, we are launching a learning management system (LMS) later this year. By using this technology to upload IPRA content, we can utilize the platform's robust capabilities to deliver on-demand learning sessions.

#### **3. Increased Reach and Engagement**

As more entities become involved in the development and delivery of the learning products and programs, we expand our reach and member engagement. There is the opportunity to co-market IPRA professional development programs. These relationships can boost attendance and engagement by tapping into a broader or complementary audience.

#### **4. Revenue and Cost-Savings**

There is clearly a benefit to cost-sharing in curriculum development, content production, and marketing. Revenue-sharing agreements have helped IPRA to create sustainable revenue streams, that are not member dues. In addition, we are able to keep member attendee/registration fees lower with this type of arrangement.



## IPRA Educational Programs

IPRA PROGRAM	PARTNERING ORGANIZATION
Financial Sustainability Certificate Program	110%
Certified Youth Sports Administrator Course	National Alliance for Youth Sports
Safe Zone Conversations	Access to Growth & BGM, LLC
Playground Maintenance Course	National Recreation & Park Association
Certified Playground Safety Inspector Course	National Recreation & Park Association
Aquatic Facility Operator Course	National Recreation & Park Association
CPRE/P Virtual Exam Prep Courses	Gold Medal Force, LLC
Certified Pool Operator Course	ML Aquatic Consulting, LLC

### Positive Proof is in the Pudding

For IPRA, as with many professional associations, partnering with other entities on professional development is not just a tactic or idea du jour; it's a strategic imperative that works. How do we know? The programs listed in this article have received rave reviews, year after year, as well as sold-out rooms and full registration lists. By working with external partners, we have expanded capacity, innovated more quickly and—the main ongoing goal—better serve IPRA members and their lifelong learning needs. Success requires thoughtful planning, aligned goals and a commitment to quality, but the return on investment (and experience) has been substantial. As with all successful endeavors whether we're in 2025 or back in 2003, you must also:

- Foster a collaborative and supportive environment by encouraging feedback from all constituents. Document suggestions, recognize all viewpoints. Ask for guidance. Don't assume you know it all. Create that safe space for experimentation and innovation.
- Monitor and evaluate progress along the way. Establish regular check-ins with pre-determined criteria and metrics. Review the progress and make adjustments to the program as needed.
- Celebrate and Communicate Success. This is the fun part! Recognize achievements, acknowledge and appreciate all efforts. Share the program's success stories, invite members to offer testimonials, which will serve to engage future participants and learners.

## IPRA Upcoming Events

### Walk the Talk: Mindfulness and Well-Being for Park & Recreation Leaders

September 10 or September 18 | Webinar

This webinar will introduce a Mindful Leadership Framework, designed to help balance organizational demands with personal well-being ultimately reducing internal and external conflict. Attendees will learn effective techniques for emotional regulation and time management, gaining valuable tools to lead their teams with resilience while enhancing their own professional and personal health.

### High Road Leadership: How to Bring People Together in a Divided World

October 8 or October 16 | Webinar

Join us for a dynamic workshop on the essential principles of transformative leadership. Based on the work of John Maxwell, you'll learn how to unite people in a divided world, balancing self-confidence with humility while understanding your motivations to serve the greater good.

### Parks & Natural Resource Management Section Roundtable & Social

October 8 | Oak Brook Park District's Family Recreation Center

Whether you're a seasoned professional or new to the field, the PNRM Section is your chance to engage, inspire, and make an impact. Join us as we shape the future of parks and natural resource management together.

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Jason Anselment  
IAPD General Counsel

## Lawmakers Conclude Challenging Spring Session

If I had to encapsulate this spring legislative session in just one word, I would call it “challenging.” As always, the budget overshadowed all other legislative issues. From the beginning, the budget was projected to be tighter, but the looming uncertainties surrounding the magnitude of potential federal cuts made budget negotiations even tougher. Throughout the spring, lawmakers were also focused on a variety of significant reforms to the public transit systems, energy policies, pensions, and many more. Nearly all those major issues remained unresolved when lawmakers adjourned on May 31.

Ultimately, fewer bills made it through both chambers. In fact, compared to this point in the 103<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, we saw a 23% reduction in the number of bills sent to the Governor for his signature.

### Three IAPD Platform Bills Pass both Chambers

This challenging session also proved to be a mixed bag for IAPD as we experienced key successes and disappointments. Fortunately, our long-term legislative strategy has us well-positioned to deliver more victories later this year or next.

This session, IAPD initiated one of its most robust platforms ever with **ten different platform bills**. As the result of our strong advocacy, one of those measures passed during the four-day Lame Duck session in January and was signed into law on February 7, 2025.

**Public Act 103-1062 (Guerrero-Cuellar, A. / Faraci, P.)** creates a specific and critical carveout to the Child Labor Law of 2024 for park districts and municipal park and recreation departments that allows them to employ a minor without a 21-year-old adult supervisor on site if the minor is (1) supervised by an adult 18 years of age or older who is an employee of the park district or the municipal parks and recreation department and no alcohol or tobacco is being sold on site; or (2) working as an officiant of youth sports activities and an adult 21 years of age or older who is an employee of the park district or the municipal parks and recreation department is on call.

This spring, two more platform bills passed both chambers. If signed by the Governor, **SB 1612 (Murphy, L. / Meyers-Martin, D.)** will double the competitive bid threshold for supplies and materials to \$60,000 under the Park District

Code, the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act, and the Conservation District Act. Because of a compromise needed to pass the bill, the competitive bid threshold for work will remain at \$30,000.

If signed by the Governor, **HB 2675 (Moylan, M. / Simmons, M.)** will provide important clarifications to recently enacted paved bicycle trail signage requirements by specifically permitting entities that maintain those trails to alert users of dangerous conditions by using cones, barricades, drums, painted markings, or other warning markers in lieu of erecting temporary signs. The legislation also promotes safety for cyclists by clarifying the rules related to permanent trail signage at highway crossings.

Most organizations are delighted to pass a single bill during a two-year session, so passing three bills during the first year of a General Assembly is a success.

### Several Other Platform Bills Are Well Positioned

Although they have not yet reached the finish line, at least three more IAPD Platform bills are poised to pass both chambers when lawmakers reconvene.

**SB 2102 (Harriss, E. / Elik, A.)** would allow all units of local government to file their budget and appropriation ordinances electronically with the county clerk. This IAPD Platform bill passed the Senate and a House committee unanimously. Instead of this bill being called for a vote on the House floor before the end of the Spring Session, it was incorporated in an omnibus bill that amended numerous other provisions of the Property Tax Code. That bill, **SB 2156 (Ventura, R. / Gordon-Booth, J.)**, passed the House in the final hours of the Spring Session, but the Senate adjourned before taking up the measure. Since identical language on the final version of the same bill must pass both chambers, one of these two bills will need to be called for a vote in the opposite chamber when lawmakers return.

Another IAPD Platform bill was incorporated in an omnibus bill on the final day of session when the language in **HB 2334 (Gong-Gershowitz, J.)** was included in an amendment to **SB 243 (Didech, D.)** that contains



numerous changes to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Open Meetings Act. IAPD's platform language would reduce the cybersecurity risk for public bodies that receive electronic FOIA requests by requiring the entirety of the request to appear within the body of the electronic submission so that no public body would be required to open hyperlinks or attached files to access the details of a request. **SB 243** passed the House in the final hours of the Spring Session, but when lawmakers return to the Capitol it still needs to make its way through the Senate.

Ultimately, no omnibus elections bill passed either chamber this spring. However, the language was filed as a Senate amendment to **HB 1832 (Harmon, D. / Smith, N.)** on the final day of the Spring Session. This amendment includes language from IAPD Platform bills **SB 1481 (McClure, S.) / HB 2500 (Spain, R.)**. Those bills would align rarely used provisions of the Park District Code related to changes in board size and term length with last year's Election Code change that moved up the candidate nomination petition deadline by four weeks.

With well over a year remaining in the 104<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, we are optimistic about the final passage of these and other IAPD Platform measures.

### More OSLAD Advocacy Is Needed

During the past decade, IAPD and its members have defeated numerous proposals to sweep dedicated OSLAD matching grant funds. Because of our success in protecting these funds during years in which no grants were awarded, there were record appropriations and grants totaling approximately \$169.5 million in the past three cycles. Yet, even with these funding levels, the demand far exceeded the amount available with nearly \$300 million in total application requests!

When the Governor proposed \$35 million for new OSLAD grants and no fund sweep during his February budget address, we were optimistic about our prospects for avoiding another battle to protect OSLAD during this year's budget negotiations. As reports of budget challenges continued to gain attention due to uncertainty surrounding the federal budget and lower than projected revenues, we remained vigilant.

This year's State budget, **SB 2510 (Sims, E., Jr. / Welch, E.)**, includes the Governor's proposed \$35 million for new OSLAD grants. However, as we reported in our Legislative Updates at the conclusion of the Spring Session, the bill implementing the budget, **HB 1075 (Gabel, R. / Sims, E., Jr.)**, diverts tens of millions of dollars from special funds, including \$10 million from the dedicated OSLAD fund, to create a contingency "Budget Reserve for Immediate Disbursements and Governmental Emergencies" or "BRIDGE" fund.

This BRIDGE fund may be used at the Governor's discretion in the event there are unanticipated delays in, or failures of, other revenues the budget relies upon, e.g., due to federal budget cuts. Because this amendment to **HB 1075** was filed with barely 12 hours remaining to pass a budget and minutes before a scheduled legislative hearing, there was no opportunity to correct statements during the budget debate that only "excess" or "unneeded" special funds were being diverted to create this contingency fund.

In contrast to other special funds, OSLAD is a reimbursement grant program, so the fund balance primarily consists of funds that are already obligated to reimburse existing grant recipients upon completion of their capital projects. Furthermore, to the extent the dedicated fund balance is not already obligated to existing projects, it is required to satisfy the unmet need demonstrated by recent grant application cycles. In other words, any notion that there is an "excess" OSLAD fund balance or the funds are "not needed" for their dedicated purpose is misguided.

This diversion amplifies the need for the Senate to pass **HB 1927 (Lilly, C. / Glowiak Hilton, S.)**. This IAPD Platform bill has already passed the House and would provide additional statutory protection for OSLAD by prohibiting those funds from being swept or transferred to another State fund.

Next year's State budget will likely be even more challenging than the one just approved. As such, it is critical for IAPD members to remain steadfast in their advocacy for OSLAD.

With legislators back in their districts this summer, it is an excellent time to invite your legislators to tour your facilities. If your agency has received OSLAD grants, be sure to emphasize the importance of that matching grant assistance to your project. If you are applying for an OSLAD grant or have other eligible capital needs, remind legislators that any diversion from dedicated OSLAD funds means less funding for park improvement projects.

### IAPD Positively Influences Other Legislation

As we discussed in legislative updates throughout the spring and during the Legislative Conference and Legislative Breakfasts, IAPD was also actively involved in numerous other bills to protect members from unfunded mandates, potential exposure to liability, and attacks on local control. Fortunately, our advocacy kept most of these measures from moving forward. This spring, we also worked to improve several other bills through the amendment process.

Our success at the Capitol is the direct result of the advocacy of IAPD members. With lawmakers scheduled to be back in their districts until the veto session in October, I encourage you to invite your legislators for a site visit to discuss all that your agency is doing to improve your community and the quality of life of your residents.



By Camilla Best  
Digital Education Coordinator

## Lifelong Learning in the Online Era: IPRA University

A relaxing summer was an uncommon occurrence in my school-aged years. Often, my brother and I spent those blistering months indoors, attending summer school classes not because we had flunked, but because we enjoyed learning. It's no surprise that these formative years cultivated a voracious hunger for lifelong learning, however masochistic that may appear to be (or blasphemous, to those of you with your own children currently enjoying their summer break).

I managed to sneak educational opportunities into my summer camp programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, when I worked as a child and youth program assistant. Ten and eleven-year-olds dissected owl pellets to discover the bird's favorite snacks, an activity vastly different from six hours of daily online learning. They could hardly imagine that I'd also examined small bones when I was their age, fifteen years earlier.

And once again, I find myself dissecting an educational opportunity -- though this time, it is much less macabre. Over the past months, the IPRA University Committee has dissected a collection of sub competencies and skills to construct the skeletal structure, then the musculature, to form the foundation of an online learning management system (LMS). The core competencies span across eight categories to cover administration & finance, communication & marketing, nature conservation & preservation, and more, to support job skills and standards.

One of our committee members is no stranger to standards. Dr. Amy Hurd, CPRE, is the Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Education at Illinois State University -- she also happens to be the co-author for the official study guide for the certified park and recreation professional examination. "This initiative is grounded in member input and shaped by the real needs of the profession," explains Hurd. "Through a statewide survey, IPRA gathered insights into how members prefer to learn, what content they need, and how to best support their growth. The competency-based learning framework was informed by job description analyses and aligned with national certification standards, including CPRP and CPRE. IPRA University underscores IPRA's ongoing commitment to elevating the field of parks and recreation."

It's worth noting that our in-person learning opportunities aren't going anywhere. Virtual content isn't going to replace the Professional Development School or the annual conference. Instead, the LMS is going to fill in the gaps between these larger events with on-demand learning. Professionals will get the chance to self-enroll and explore topics of interest outside their day-to-day activities. This might look like a ten-minute microlearning on the topic of managing customers, or a sixty-minute legacy content piece featuring fellow professionals. This has led to my collaboration with experts from Chicago to Champaign-Urbana in order to transform their presentations into virtual learning opportunities.

It's also vital to recognize that learning management systems began emerging in the early 2000s to support higher education courses. The integration of internet-based learning may feel natural to the digital natives of Millennials and Gen Z-ers, and to professionals who obtained a master's or doctorate degree within the past twenty years. While the educational methodology may be different from generations prior, it's by no means exclusionary. Accessibility tools such as playback speed and closed captions are included in video controls, and an auto-enrolled onboarding course will help to equalize the user experience, regardless of prior online learning experiences. Content featuring embedded interactive games ensures engaged learning. A scenario-based interaction can help your front desk workers decide what to do when a customer is upset that the membership fees increased. A drag-and-drop game can help playground inspectors identify materials for a PIP system.

By adapting traditional learning experiences to virtual formats, busy professionals can learn at their own pace without needing to wait for the next big in-person event. The efforts to continuously learn foster continuous improvement, which not only better our own careers, but better the experiences of the communities we serve. With the anticipated launch in the near future, we hope that IPRA University captures that love of continual learning and generates excitement in exploring other domains of parks and recreation. We'll see you online after your own non-relaxing summers.



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A woman with dark hair, wearing a black Zumba tank top and a yellow visor, is smiling and posing with a large, inflatable yellow star character. The star character has a face with large eyes and a wide smile, and its body is covered in small, circular indentations. The woman is standing in front of a swimming pool, with a lifeguard stand and a brick building in the background. The text "MEETING THE MOMENT" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the center of the image.

# MEETING THE MOMENT

## How Our Park District Builds a Better Summer for All

By Carolyn Mondlock, Division Manager, Marketing & Communication, Carol Stream, IL

Summer lives in our memories—those carefree childhood days of lake swims, catching fireflies, and bike rides to the park. As an adult, I now realize many of the best moments happened close to home. Most of our summers were *staycations*—splashing in the local pool, playing kickball at camp. One of my favorite memories was when staff from our park district unlocked a metal games box in the park each weekday morning. They led games or just hung out with us. That's where summer happened every day.

While summer is packed with opportunities for all ages, the Carol Stream Park District focuses on giving kids meaningful, memorable experiences through a variety of programs designed just for them. And it all starts with what summer is all about—Camps!





## Where Camp Becomes a Childhood Chapter

Our largest priority is giving kids a great summer. Camps are the heart of it—offering a safe, active place for children to make friends, try new things and stay engaged while school's out. For Carol Stream parents who need daytime care, we house two large Adventure camps, one at each of our two main facilities.

"Awesome" camp sees 170 kids a day; "Epic" hosts 90–100 kids a day. Both offer before and after care options. We employ 20–25 camp counselors per day for Awesome Adventure Camp, and 10–14 staff per day for Epic Adventure camp.

The park district partners with the local high school to offer 20 sports camps during the course of the summer at the school. Kids in grades 3–12 register through us but train directly with the high school coaching staff. The variety of camps include baseball, basketball, football, soccer, tennis, volleyball—even kayak fishing.

For families looking for a half-day option, we offer an 8-week Summer Sports Camp from 9am to 1pm that focuses on backyard-style fun—kickball, gaga ball, capture the flag, wiffleball, steal the bacon and more. New in 2024 for ages 7–11, the camp was a hit—and spots for 2025 are filling fast.

As kids grow and explore new interests, the Carol Stream Park District—like many park districts across Illinois—partners with specialized contractors to offer camps and classes that go beyond what we can provide in-house, expanding opportunities to match a wide range of interests. For those that like to learn skills with a computer, we offer several coding camps using STEM principles, robotics fundamentals and even AI. Specialty camps include horse riding, lifeguard prep and drone racing. Building on the strength of our popular gymnastics and dance programs, our in-house offerings include themed camps that let kids dive deeper into skills while having fun. For the littlest campers, we offer 3-hour STEAM and Little Explorers camps with a balance of structure and purposeful play.

## Splash, Slide, Repeat: Summer at Coral Cove

Summer means waterslides, diving boards and splash buckets! Coral Cove Water Park is a local gathering place for families. It's where kids learn to swim, parents unwind in the sun or shade, and friends come together for birthday parties and private rentals. But the pool is more than just a fun place—it's a vital piece of community infrastructure. When we had to close early one year for essential maintenance, the response was loud and clear: this place matters.



To keep things fresh, Coral Cove hosts rotating theme days that change each year. This year's lineup includes themed events like Father's Day, 80s Day, Rock & Splash, Christmas in July, and a few pop culture favorites. We're also planning one Friday each month for late-night swimming, along with early member access that includes a sensory hour. Special events include a Middle School Party, Glow Swim and Back-to-School Bash.

Operationally, the Carol Stream Park District contracts Jeff Ellis Management (JEM) to hire and oversee lifeguards, manage daily operations, and assist with water park theme days. This year, JEM has employed 64 lifeguards at Coral Cove Water Park—many of them local teens starting their first job. Lifeguarding teaches life-saving skills, responsibility and leadership. For some teens, it's their first real sense of purpose, knowing they play a critical role in creating a safe, fun environment for the entire community.

### Coyote Crossing: Where Fun Finds Its Course

Coyote Crossing Mini Golf has become a true destination, thanks to the creativity and passion of our staff. Branded with our friendly mascot, Cody Coyote, the railroad-themed course offers more than just 18 holes of mini golf. Guests can enjoy a beverage at Cody's Hideout, play yard games,

or make s'mores at the firepit when weather permits. The space is also perfect for gatherings and private rentals.

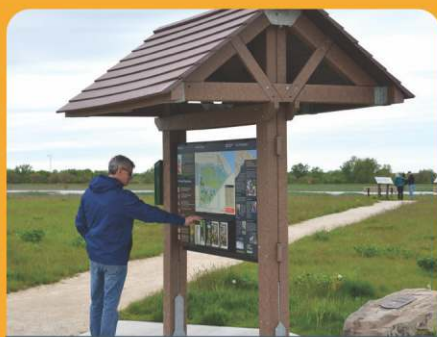
Themed nights add extra fun to Coyote Crossing, with events like "The Eras Tour," Pup & Putt, *Harry Potter*, *Stranger Things*, and Not-So-Scary Golf. Staff transform the course with music, props and décor to match each theme, creating a unique experience every time.

A standout from last summer is Coyote Crossing's new mini golf league, featuring two sessions of five weeks of themed play—it was so popular, this summer's first session is already full. My spouse and I joined last year, met another couple, and we're back again this season. Park districts are where friendships happen.

### Adventures for Grown-Ups

Adults deserve memorable adventures too. This summer we offer 20 adult day trips, including boat cruises, museum visits, casinos, and local festivals. For those staying close to home, we have culinary and painting classes, creative crafts and nature walks.

Our Fountain View Fitness Center offers specialty group training programs designed for mature adults, including



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aqua fitness classes in the indoor pool, “Injury Prevention & Mobility,” “Please Those Knees,” and a new personal training program—StretchPro Coaching—which features targeted stretches and assisted movements to release tension and improve joint range of motion.

Summer is also when we see new trends take off—and we do our best to stay ahead of them. In recent years, that’s meant investing in pickleball courts and launching wildly popular pickleball leagues, tournaments and classes. Socially active adults in Carol Stream have embraced coed Cup-In-Hand Kickball, dodgeball, bean bag and softball leagues.

### The Faces of Our Summer Workforce

Behind every program is a team of staff who make it all happen. From early planning meetings in winter to full days on the go in July, they’re the ones who bring our summer to life. Their energy, creativity and ability to adapt on the fly—whether it’s a weather delay, a last-minute registration or a new facility opening—are what make our offerings feel seamless to the public.

We employ over 150 young adults during the summer across all our programs—from high school students to college-aged staff and beyond. Park districts are among the largest employers of part-time seasonal workers, and for many, this is their first job. These roles help young people build confidence, leadership skills and a sense of responsibility. Whether they’re leading campers, teaching swim lessons, or helping at special events, our seasonal staff play a big part in creating a safe, welcoming and fun environment for everyone.

### Summer Feels Like Home

At the end of the day, the Carol Stream Park District helps make summer possible. We provide safe places for kids to learn and play, jobs for young adults and programs that bring people together. Whether it’s a day at camp, a night at the pool, or a game of mini golf, every experience is designed to keep our community active, connected and proud to call Carol Stream home.



*Carolyn Mondlock has lived in Carol Stream for 22 years and has worked at the Carol Stream Park District since 2005. After several years in recreation, she transitioned into marketing, where she now serves as division manager of marketing & communications. Carolyn brings more than 20 years of prior corporate experience in various industries, with a strong background in technical writing, instructional content development and proposal management. She and her husband live with their dog and bearded dragon and have two grown children. Outside of work, Carolyn enjoys golfing, hiking, and experimenting with creative recipes in the kitchen.*



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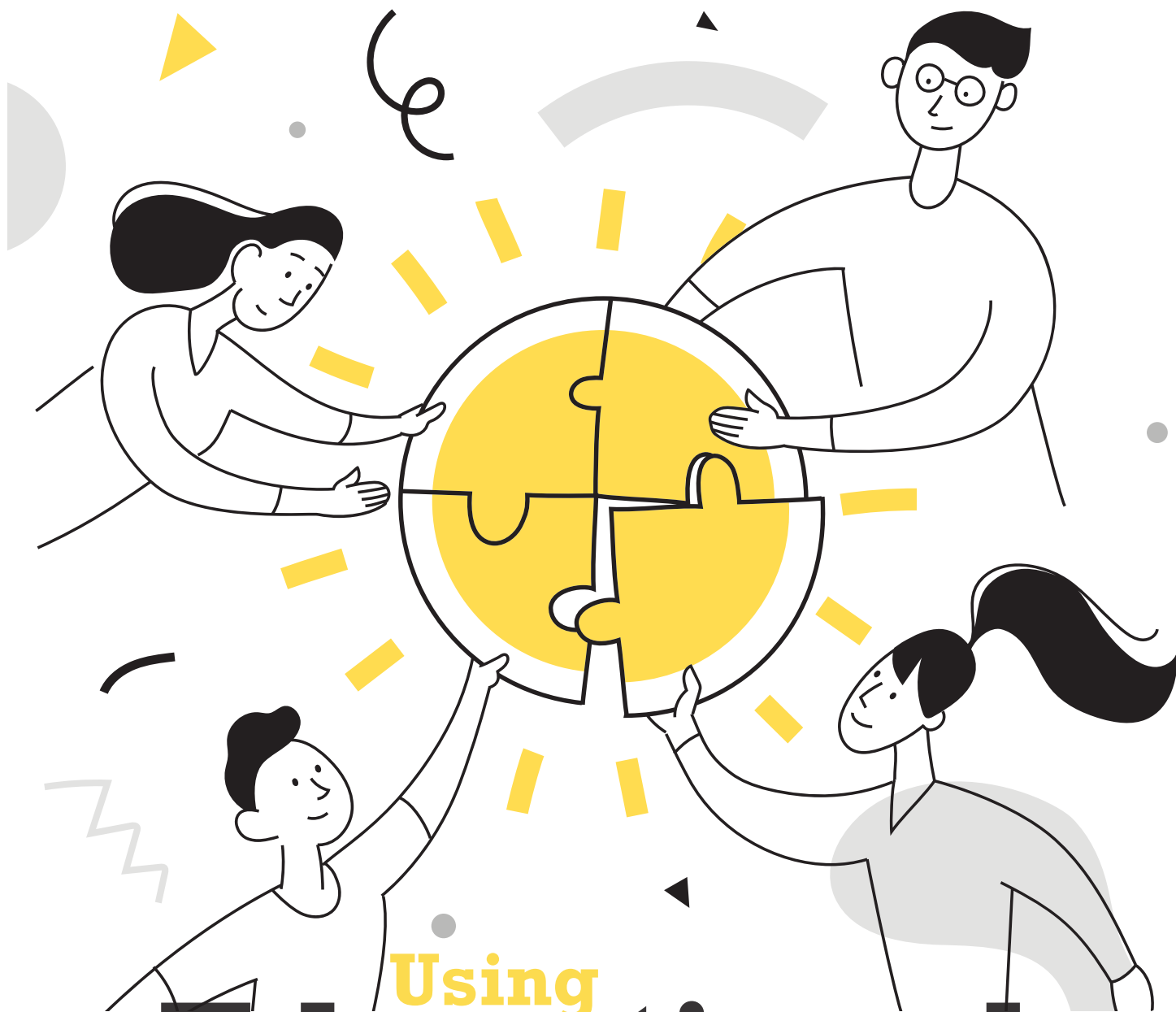
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# Using Educational Partnerships

## TO IMPROVE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

By **Trisha Breitlow**, CTRS, CPRE, Executive Director, Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation, Morton Grove, Illinois  
**Joseph Ferrallo**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Marketing, University of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois

Gathering public feedback is critical to helping guide key decisions in the strategic planning process for park and recreation professionals. Park and recreation agencies, including special recreation associations, are able to remain responsive to the public by conducting periodic community needs assessments. These surveys are important tools in measuring resident/participant satisfaction, identifying community needs and determining future planning priorities and resource allocation.



**M-NASR was able to secure a partnership that would lead to the development of a needs assessment survey at no cost, and Dr. Ferrallo's students would get a hands-on, semester-long, experiential learning opportunity that they could apply to their future careers.**

In 2024, the Maine-Niles Association of Special Recreation (M-NASR) was faced with a common dilemma – they needed a comprehensive community needs assessment, but their resources to accomplish it were limited. M-NASR serves individuals with disabilities in seven member districts: Des Plaines Park District, Golf Maine Park District, Morton Grove Park District, Niles Park District, Skokie Park District and the Village of Lincolnwood Parks and Recreation Department.

Before the assessment could be administered, M-NASR needed a partner to help create one based on its strategic planning goals. In reaching out to other SRAs for resource recommendations, M-NASR's executive director, Trisha Breitlow, was introduced to Dr. Joseph Ferrallo of the University of St. Francis in Joliet, Illinois.

In 2013, Dr. Ferrallo came up with the idea to create educational partnerships with not-for-profit agencies, as well as providing students with real-life hands-on experience. He recognized that adult students need to learn practical work skills, and not-for-profit agencies need help looking at their business operations at a ten-thousand-foot view to see how they provide client services, and critically evaluate what they do well, and what opportunity areas they can improve in. Dr. Ferrallo's classes have worked with dozens of not-for-profit agencies in Will, Kane, Grundy, DuPage and Cook counties.

As Breitlow and Ferrallo talked, it became clear that a partnership would benefit both M-NASR and the University of St. Francis students that Dr. Ferrallo teaches and mentors. It was a win-win situation:

M-NASR was able to secure a partnership that would lead to the development of a needs assessment survey at no cost, and Dr. Ferrallo's students would get a hands-on, semester-long, experiential learning opportunity that they could apply to their future careers.

The five areas that Dr. Ferrallo's class researches and reports on are:

1. Identifying website form, function, and layout improvement opportunities
2. Identifying social media usage, opportunities, and plans
3. Identifying new marketing opportunities/efficiencies
4. Identifying opportunities to increase fund-raising efforts
5. Providing suggestions to increase volunteer opportunities
6. Conducted customer/client surveys

### **Identifying website form, function, and layout improvement opportunities**

At the beginning of each unique client project, Dr. Ferrallo creates a memorandum of understanding, which outlines the specific work his class will perform for each not-for-profit. Students are assigned specific research areas aimed at improving a not-for-profit agency's website form, functionality, and layout. Research is conducted, and explanations and examples along with visuals are presented to improve long-term business performance.



**In the current space of reduced federal, state and local funding, every not-for-profit agency should be engaged in soliciting donations from individuals, small businesses, and large corporations who want to contribute to making their communities better places to live for all.**

### **Identifying social media usage, opportunities, and plans**

Dr. Ferrallo's students research how a specific not-for-profit agency is using social media to connect with clients, stakeholders, and supporters. Further, students examine the social media platforms the agency uses, the target, frequency and quality of social media posts. Once data is gathered, students devise a targeted list of suggestions to help agencies improve their social media use, presence, posting frequency, and posting reach.

### **Identifying new marketing opportunities/efficiencies**

In the current space of reduced federal, state and local funding, every not-for-profit agency should be engaged in soliciting donations from individuals, small businesses, and large corporations who want to contribute to making their communities better places to live for all. Specifically, not-for-profits have to create a value proposition for future donors by telling their story to garner new donors and new volunteers to support the growing demand for each agency's need to provide more programming. Crafting scripts for localized YouTube videos/Public Service Announcements, as well as providing new avenues for improved social media posts is the careful methodology not-for-profit agencies must embrace to put their brand front and center in the minds of future donors and volunteers.

### **Identifying opportunities to increase fundraising efforts**

Fundraising is critical to the viability and long-term growth for all not-for-profit agencies. Dr. Ferrallo's class engages in current research to highlight new, creative and lasting ways, not-for-profits can increase fundraising, with reduced human capital resource and expense.

### **Providing suggestions to increase volunteer opportunities**

Volunteers both dedicated and casual, are the lifeblood of any not-for-profit agency operations. By engaging in current trend research, Dr. Ferrallo's students provide new avenues for not-for-profit agencies to solicit new volunteers to meet agency demands to support programming growth.

### **Conducted customer/client surveys**

Breitlow and Ferrallo worked together to clarify M-NASR's assessment goals for the surveys. After having completed a strategic plan in 2022, M-NASR had specific questions regarding transportation and the need for new programming including an additional sensory room and starting an adult day program. University of St. Francis students created the survey, getting approval from M-NASR on the final document. Gathering feedback from the communities M-NASR serves involved social media, direct emails and would also require cooperation from all member agencies to achieve a high response rate.

Dr. Ferrallo's key points for the collaborative process include:

**1. Embrace vulnerability** – Forming educational partnerships and collaboration puts the not-for-profit in an awkward position: the position to deeply look at itself without fault, but through the lens of vulnerability, willing to open itself up to examination, scrutiny, and questions. This step is truly necessary to promote long-term agency growth, vitality, and relevance.

**2. Seek new ideas** – As the old saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. This means that not-for-profit agencies have gone through countless growth iterations, and do not think about the back-end business processes often because the main focus is client programming.



**3. Keep current** – Like all businesses, not-for-profits engage and use technology. But are they using technology most effectively? Are they taking advantage of free software to improve overall performance?

**4. Do not say no to free help** – In the past, I have approached many not-for-profits to offer my services only to be told, “we are not interested.” As a collaborator with a not-for-profit, my role is not to judge a not-for-profit agency's previous performance, my role is strictly to help the agency change its future by recommending best practices to improve future business performance.



**Trisha Breitlow, Executive Director, M-NASR**

*Trisha Breitlow is the Executive Director at the Maine-Niles Association Special Recreation (M-NASR). Trisha began her career in 1999 at the Northwest Special Recreation Association (NWSRA). After experience in direct programming, leisure education, inclusion and day camps, she held the position of superintendent of*

*administrative services. Breitlow earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Therapeutic Recreation from Winona State University*

*in Minnesota. She holds her CTRS and CPRPE certifications and has held certification as a Professional in Human Resources (PHR). She is actively involved in professional organizations, having served in leadership roles with the Illinois Therapeutic Recreation Section Professional Development School Board of Regents (IPRA), a committee for the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC), and as chair of IPRA. Trisha believes in learning from every experience, whether positive or challenging and believes every situation has something to share in the future.*



**Dr. Joseph Ferrallo**

*Dr. Joseph Ferrallo is assistant professor of marketing at the University of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois. Dr. Ferrallo is a 3-time alumni of University of St. Francis holding a bachelor's degree in business administration, a master's degree in business administration, as well as a master's degree in training and development. In 2023, Dr. Ferrallo earned his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*

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A photograph of a child wearing a blue shirt, a white helmet, and a safety harness, climbing a large, artificial rock wall. The wall is divided into sections of orange and blue, with various climbing holds. The child is positioned on the right side of the wall, reaching up. The background is a clear blue sky.

# SUMMER IN STREAMWOOD: IT'S A COMMUNITY THING

By Jason Pawlowski, Marketing and Communications Manager, Streamwood Park District

The link between local park districts and the events they create for the communities they represent is paramount to the overall health and wellness of a community. This rings particularly true during the summer months when kids are out of school and families are always on the hunt for things to do in their town. But with the addictive nature of technology and screens, budgetary considerations, and ever-changing tastes for family activities, how does a park district stay relevant and connected to its audience?





The Streamwood Park District has been making connections with the residents and businesses of Streamwood for almost 60 years. With nearly 50 local parks, numerous athletic fields and courts, and a wide variety of indoor and outdoor recreational amenities, there's certainly no shortage of places and spaces to frequent in this diverse community.

Streamwood Park District Executive Director Jeff Janda felt that the COVID-19 shutdown led to the rediscovery of the beauty and versatility of local parks.

Since then, he has seen a marked uptick in attendance not only in their parks, but in programming and for special events geared towards all ages. Janda credits that to his staff's imagination and creativity to turn ideas into reality to create memorable experiences within the community.

Adam Vasquez, CPRP, CPO, leads the park district's recreational programming efforts as the superintendent of recreation. Throughout his career, he has been dedicated to providing quality and innovative recreation services and programming to the communities he's served. He has seen

how social connection is at the heart of what park districts do. Summer events provide a perfect opportunity for people to get outside, interact, and build community in a fun and relaxed way.

A recent example would be the park district's free annual Summer Kickoff event which took place on Friday, June 6 at Hoosier Grove Park. The event saw almost 1,200 residents come out on the first Friday of June for free hot dogs, live music, kids' activities, games, fitness demonstrations and a local vendor fair.

During the event, Janda noted they even ran out of hot dogs until a quick-thinking recreation manager rushed to a local store and purchased all the remaining hot dogs in stock. Upon returning to the event, the public began chanting her name as though she were an Olympic athlete or professional baseball player, which gave an exciting and vibrant feeling of just how tight knit the community is with its park district.

The Streamwood Park District's other popular family-oriented summer events include their Play in the Park series, where they bring games, activities, music, and healthy snacks directly into neighborhood parks.



Another example is the annual Fishing Derby in September; an opportunity for families to connect with nature and each other in a peaceful, tech-free setting at Surrey Woods Park. The Fishing Derby is a successful collaboration between the Kiwanis Club of Streamwood and the park district, one of many collaborative relationships that Janda has always advocated for and developed throughout his career.

Because most community events are free, Vasquez said the barriers to participation are eliminated while also making sure wellness is accessible to everyone.

Vasquez also points to a renewed focus on more adult social experiences, such as Mixology nights and a Wine & Yoga event at the Hoosier Grove Barn, the park district's historic and award-winning wedding and events venue. Coupled with their annual premiere beer tasting event, Hoosier Grove Barn & Brew, this provides adults with the opportunity to relax, connect, and expand their social circles.

Creating social events geared towards adults meets a need that is missing in a lot of communities, Vasquez said. There is a sense of pride at the Streamwood Park District to be able to not only address these needs but to provide multiple outlets for adults.

What are the most important factors to consider when creating meaningful and positive experiences for people? Vasquez notes the Streamwood Park District focuses on three main objectives: inclusivity, accessibility, and quality of experience.

"Streamwood is a beautifully diverse community, and our programs need to reflect that," says Vasquez. "That means being intentional about affordability, cultural relevance, and accessibility for people of all ages and abilities. We also consider location. Can people walk or bike there safely? Is it accessible for those without personal transportation? And finally, we want each experience to be memorable. If someone chooses to spend their time with us, we want them to leave thinking, 'That was worth it. I want to come back.' That's what drives us."

In addition to events, the Streamwood Park District also offers year-round insurance-based programs such as Silver Sneakers, Renew Active, Active and Fit, and Silver and Fit. These programs make it easy for people of all ages to work out at the fitness center inside Park Place Family Recreation Center in partnership with RUSH Physical Therapy to improve their overall health.



*Jason Pawlowski is the Marketing & Communications Manager for the Streamwood Park District. A career communicator, Jason's experience includes 15+ years of government marketing and communications and 6 years as a journalist. He enjoys golf, karaoke, photography, and movies.*



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BY ALEX STRAUGHN, GENERAL MANAGER, SFI TOPSOIL



**By weaving together engineered rootzones, precise mixes, organic enrichments, and a disciplined maintenance calendar, Parks & Rec professionals can deliver safe, high-performance fields that keep summer programming on track and on budget.**

### **The Construction Phase: Engineered Athletic Fields**

Modern grass multi-use fields rely on a sand-based rootzone (12–16 inches thick) over a 4-inch gravel layer and subsurface piping. Sand's natural resistance to compaction and superior drainage keeps heavy foot traffic from turning fields into mud pits. To bolster moisture and nutrients, screened compost or peat is blended at ratios from 5–15% organic amendment. This never exceeds ASTM F2396's organic matter limits, because that would cause layering that chokes roots.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's biosolids program actually applied air-dried Class A biosolids to Highland Country Club and Cook County Forest Preserves, converting wastewater solids into turf-boosting amendments. The results demonstrated how public partners can turn waste into playtime.

### **Fine-Tuning Baseball Diamonds**

Just as multi-use fields depend on clean drainage, baseball infields demand a precise balance of sand, silt, and clay. Recreational diamonds often start at 70% sand and 30% silt+clay, while professional and collegiate fields aim for 60% sand, 20% clay, and 20% silt. This combo balances firmness, ball bounce, and safety. Calcined clay conditioners are used to help soils hold moisture during dry July stretches, preserving playability and reducing “bad hops” that can lead to injuries.

After the 2007 season, Wrigley Field's grounds crew removed the old dirt-based base, installed a state-of-the-art drainage system, and rebuilt the infield as a sand-based profile—transforming the historic ballpark's playability and reducing rainouts dramatically.

### **Crafting Consistent Golf Greens**

Golf greens demand precision. USGA recommended greens feature a 12-inch sand-dominant rootzone ( $\geq 60\%$  sand, 5–20% clay, minimal fines) atop a 4-inch gravel layer for rapid runoff. This specification, refined over decades, controls pore space to deliver uniform ball roll and healthy turf, even under relentless golfer traffic in the summer.

At North Shore Country Club, superintendents tested an 85:15 sand-compost-biochar topdressing on greens. They found that the organic boost improved infiltration, reduced chemical inputs, and kept greens in good condition, even after charity tournaments and member scrambles.

### **Enriching Soils with Organics**

Mineral mixes lay the foundation but organic amendments bring turf to life. Compost reduces compaction, promotes microbial activity, and increases water-holding capacity, especially in sandy profiles. Biosolids, turned into Class A soil amendments by MWRD, supply nitrogen and organic matter cost-effectively, sustainably recycling treatment byproducts into premium topdressing materials. Combining these with regular aeration rejuvenates worn turf, dilutes thatch, and maintains surface levels under heavy summer use.



## Choosing the Right Aggregates

Whether building a field, diamond, or green, particle size matters. ASTM standards recommend medium sand (0.5–1.0 mm) at 60–70% of the mix, fines (silt + clay + very fine sand) ≤10%, and gravel (2–3.4 mm) <3% to avoid layering and ensure consistent drainage. In infields, keeping coarse material under 3% prevents rock pockets that can trip players, while the right sand fraction gives that classic feel.

## The Maintenance Phase: Keeping Surfaces Game-Ready

Construction only sets the stage; seasonal maintenance keeps the performance rolling all summer long.

## Aeration & Topdressing

Quarter-inch to half-inch cores relieve compaction, opening pathways for air, water, and roots. Immediately following, spread a thin layer of compatible mix or compost topdressing to level low spots, integrate organic matter, and restore firmness, techniques championed by the Sports Turf Managers Association.

## Smart Irrigation & Drainage

Deep, infrequent watering (1–3 times per week) encourages roots to seek moisture. This is key during hot, dry July days. Automatic systems and subsurface drains beneath sand-based profiles remove excess rainfall in minutes, slashing rain delays for leagues and tournaments alike.

## Conclusion & Pro Tips

By weaving together engineered rootzones, precise mixes, organic enrichments, and a disciplined maintenance calendar, Parks & Rec professionals can deliver safe, high-performance fields that keep summer programming on track and on budget.

### Quick Tips for Parks & Rec Teams:

- Pre-Season Prep: Confirm particle specs with lab analyses before ordering bulk dirt.
- In-Season Checks: Install moisture sensors and check pH monthly to catch issues early.
- Waste-Not, Want-Not: Partner with local treatment plants for biosolids—eco-friendly and cost-effective.
- Player-First Mindset: Schedule minor repairs during off-hours; prioritize safety and playability.

With these strategies, your athletic fields, diamonds, and greens will shine—even under the summer sun. Enjoy the games!



*Alex Straughn is currently the general manager at SFI Topsoil. He has been supplying pulverized topsoil to the Chicago area for over two decades. As an active member of ILCA and chief engineer, his commitment to industry standards makes him a trusted resource for construction and landscaping professionals everywhere.*

## A Seasonal Maintenance Roadmap

SEASON	KEY TASKS	WHY IT MATTERS
Spring	Field inspection, core aeration, seeding	Repairs winter damage and primes root growth
Early Summer	Topdressing, fertilizer application	Levels playing surfaces, sustains vigor
Mid-Season	Moisture monitoring, spot repairs	Prevents turf loss under peak usage
Late Summer	Overseeding (cool-season turf), soil tests	Prepares surfaces for fall transition

Align these tasks with camp schedules and league play to minimize downtime and ensure every weekend is game-ready.



## PEOPLE & PLACES



### **Byron Forest Preserve District Announces New Executive Director**

The Byron Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners has hired a new executive director, **Andrew Hawkins**.

Andrew Hawkins has over twenty-seven years of experience in parks, recreation and environmental management. Andrew has been with the Forest Preserve District of Will County for over 17 years. He is currently the director of conservation and previously served in the roles of both director and superintendent of planning and development. His career began at Lake Shelbyville as the Site Naturalist for Eagle Creek and Wolf Creek State Parks. With the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, he served as an ecosystem administrator and assistant regional land manager. Between the years of 2005 and 2006, he was the resource conservationist at the Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District. Prior to the downturn in residential and commercial development in the mid-2000's, he was an environmental consultant that specialized in conservation design development and permitting. Andrew received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Murray State University.



### **Lewis retires as commissioner of the Bartlett Park District**

Bartlett Park District announces the retirement of longtime commissioner **Theodore J. Lewis** after 42 years of committed service.

Ted was first elected to Bartlett Park District Board of Commissioners for a six-year term on May 2, 1983. He has helped guide the district through a tremendous period of growth and been an incredible asset using his experience as an

attorney to advocate and protect the interest of the park district and residents of Bartlett. During his tenure and through his guidance and leadership, the park district has grown from nine parks in 1983 to 43 parks today, built relationships including the first joint project with the school district in developing three elementary school agreements, supporting intergovernmental agreements with the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, and being an advocate for strong relationships with the Village of Bartlett. He helped guide the park district in successfully passing four referendums along with being involved in the building of several neighborhood parks, renovating the administration building, parks department, and Apple Orchard Golf Course clubhouse. He was also involved in the purchase of the property and creation of the Bartlett Community Center, Bartlett Aquatic Center, Skate Park, and O'Brien Woods Interpretive Trail, and the acquisition of Villa Olivia.

Ted was instrumental in getting the Parks Foundation off the ground and has served on the board of trustees since its inception in 2002. In 2020 the Free To Be Me Inclusive Playground opened thanks to the foundation and park board support and fundraising. In 2023, to honor of his 40<sup>th</sup> year board anniversary, the district renamed Oak Grove Park the Theodore J. Lewis Park.



### **Byron Forest Preserve Announces Retirement of Executive Director after Thirty Years of Service**

**Todd Tucker** has retired as executive director from the Byron Forest Preserve District.

Todd's journey with the Byron Forest Preserve District started in 1995 as an intern where he quickly moved up the ranks and was hired on as a full-time naturalist. Todd was passionate about educating others about the natural surrounding areas and restoration of these areas. In the early 2000's, Todd was hired as deputy executive director, moved to executive director in 2008 and has held that position for 17 years. Under Todd's directorship, the district has grown tremendously with many upgrades to the golf clubhouse and course, the addition of the Keller Education Center, Prairie Fire Golf and Grill, preserve additions and countless restoration efforts to make the preserves what they are today.



## PEOPLE & PLACES



### Director of Villa Park Parks & Recreation Retires

**Greg Gola**, parks and recreation director for the Village of Villa Park retired on June 5.

Greg received his recreation degree from Southern Illinois University. He worked at the St. Charles and Sycamore Park Districts, and at Villa Park as

parks & recreation director since 2010. He served as the IPRA Teen Committee Chair (1997), IPRA Metro Representative (1999), graduated from the IPRA/NRPA's Professional Development School and served on the Northeast DuPage Special Recreation and Sugar Creek Golf Course Boards for 15 years.

Greg's accomplishments include building Villa Park's new recreation center, garnering four OSLAD Grants, building a new skatepark, adding community garden plots, and completing park renovations at Cortesi Veterans Memorial, N. Terrace, Lufkin and Lions Parks. He also renovated the Great Western Train Depot, Jefferson Pool Bath House and N. Terrace buildings.

In addition, Greg upgraded 9 playgrounds, started summer concert series in Sycamore and Villa Park and completed a \$1.3 million pond/shoreline restoration project at Sugar Creek Golf Course with partner Elmhurst Park District.



### Rachel Lenz hired as new Urbana Park District executive director

**Rachel Lenz** was hired as the executive director of the Urbana Park District in May 2025. She brings over 16 years of parks and recreation experience, most recently serving as Executive Director of the Macomb Park District. During her time in Macomb, she led the agency through significant growth and innovation, emphasizing inclusive programming, community partnerships, and operational excellence.

Lenz has held a wide range of leadership roles in the field, including work in special recreation, event planning, and executive management. She is known for her collaborative approach, strong advocacy for accessibility, and commitment to staff and community engagement.

She holds both a Bachelor of Science in Therapeutic Recreation and a Master of Science in Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration from Western Illinois University. She is also a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) and a Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP).

In her new role, Lenz is eager to continue building on Urbana Park District's legacy of equity, inclusion, and innovation, and to strengthen the district's connection to the diverse communities it serves.

### Byron Forest Preserve Announces Retirement

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